

# ENGLISH LITERATURE

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS FROM  
POETRY AND PROSE

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TO

ALL THOSE, NOW MEN AND WOMEN,  
MANY OF THEM TEACHERS,

WHOM I HAVE TRIED TO TEACH

1889-1923

## PREFACE

**W**E English have been called a "nation of shopkeepers." Since, in such a climate as ours, no one can exist without clothes and shelter, to say nothing of food, which all animal creatures want, we need not be ashamed if we have spent time, effort and thought on producing these first necessities of life.

Shopkeepers or no, we have, from our earliest days, shown that we realise that "Man doth not live by bread only." However money-making or dull we may, as a race, seem to some other nations, we have produced a literature which in beauty, depth and variety cannot be surpassed perhaps by any other.

This book is not meant to be an Outline History of this our Literature: plenty of such exist. It has, as its main aim, the purpose of helping some of those who do not know much or perhaps anything about it, or who may be thinking of it as a dull, horrid thing which they have to "learn" in school, to see it as it is. But in trying to carry out that aim, it is not going to pretend that this great heritage of ours will ever be really ours if we take no trouble at all to get hold of it. That is there, waiting for everyone, if we will take some trouble to find, and understand it. Never, nowhere has a mortal being got something for nothing. If he seemed to do so, someone else paid the price. "The gods sell



## PREFACE

us all things for labour," said the greatest scholar of the sixteenth century.

In the past, children have found too many difficulties. In the present, people seem inclined to take them all away. I have tried to steer between these two plans, and have probably failed, as to hold a middle course is always harder than to run to either extreme.

Still, I venture to hope that this book may become, to some children at least, too dear to throw away when school days are done, because the extracts in it will have served to show them that their "lot has fallen in a fair ground." I hope that however they may come—as they should do if they are really to value their own rightly—to love the literatures of other nations, they may still keep a corner for the book which may have been one of the first to serve them as a small doorway into an enchanted and enchanting land.

One pitfall I have tried to avoid. If I may borrow a favourite adjective of a famous Cambridge Classical Professor, I have tried not to make a "stuffy" book.

G. E. H.

*September, 1923.*

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# ENGLISH LITERATURE

## CHAPTER I

### THE "FORMS" OF LITERATURE

**I**T is not unusual to hear grown-up, and not grown-up, people say, "I hate poetry," or even more sweepingly, "I hate literature."

No English-speaking mortal has any ground for saying either; for if there be a race whose written-down thoughts and feelings are full of interest and full of variety, it surely is our own. Unfortunately, many of us are too ignorant to know that our Literature contains something of lasting and intense value for every one of us, if only we would take as much trouble to find it as we do to secure everyday comforts and pleasures, or even to catch fish, hunt butterflies, or collect stamps. As men and women gradually learned, through the passing ages, to write down their thoughts, feelings, desires and opinions, they used many different ways or forms of expressing themselves. It is not very easy to distinguish these "forms," if we try to take our Literature in exact historical order; but we can safely say that it seems as if men used verse before prose—that is, for their literary work as apart from their everyday speech when, for instance, they discussed their affairs, or quarrelled, or asked other people to supply their needs.

Further, it would seem that among the many shapes which verse or poetry can take, the Epic comes first; or, as Sir Philip Sidney called it, "the Heroick." The reason is that songs and stories were needed before men invented the making of books, for feasts and other great occasions were enlivened by narratives, whether sung or

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said, of the heroic deeds and hairbreadth escapes of the better-known members of a tribe or nation. We all know that it is more difficult to remember prose than verse, whether rimed or unrimed.

An Epic is a story, distinguished from other stories by the fact that it all centres round or radiates from a person, or a very small group of persons, or the essential part of one nation's life. In this latter case, the differences of the many people making up a nation are disregarded, and the race or nation is treated as if it were a single whole, a person; the word "person" signifies in one of its meanings a corporate collection.

Properly speaking, an Epic should take the form of verse, but there are prose Epics; the essence of an Epic consists in the centredness, the one-ness of its story.

The verse-form called the Lyric springs up very early in the life of a people. Properly speaking, it is a song, meant, or fit, to be sung. As the Greeks were the earliest European people to excel in literature, and as their instrument was the lyre, a song to be sung came naturally to be called a "lyric." It is perhaps the most comprehensive of all forms of poetry; it is found in most times and places, and deals with the most varied subjects. Indeed, some people seem to fancy that everything which is not definitely something else can be called a lyric. But it really is not one of Humpty Dumpty's "portmanteau" words of which he said complacently, "When *I* use a word, it means what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less."

Wide as its scope is, the word cannot be described so. The great distinguishing mark of the true lyric is that while it deals with an individual, personal experience, it must make a universal appeal. One human being has felt, or known, or desired this, that or the other, and, if a true lyric poet, he has expressed this so that it appeals to all who share our common human nature, and who will take the trouble to cultivate their minds, their senses, their feelings, and their wills. This perhaps is only saying at length what Mr. Maurice Hewlett once

said in a few words: "Lyric poetry must come from the heart, or it will not fit the lyre."

Further, there is a "song to be sung" which is common to all literatures, but still is not a lyric: it is the simple story, told in verse, to which the name *Ballad* has been given; a name which comes from the Latin word for dancing. The Epic generally speaking, the Lyric and the Ballad always are forms of poetry. Besides these, since one of poetry's functions is to give expression to every kind of human thought and feeling, sorrow, woe, despair even, must be included; and these find their proper place in the Elegy, or Lament, and in the case of a Burial Song, the Dirge. Possibly, the most magnificent of all poetic forms is the Ode, though, as Mr. Edmund Gosse pointed out many years ago, the original meaning of the Greek word was simply "chant." But in the course of ages the name, though often inaccurately applied to verse which strays a long way from the Ode-form, has become attached to a triumphant, emotional, and splendid outburst of song, arranged in a series of triple verses, known as the *strophe*, *antistrophe*, and *epode*, of which the metre of the first two should be precisely similar. But even now any poem on a noble subject, which is carried along to a definite end, or goal, in language at once musical, laudatory, and full of high, dignified feeling would probably be allowed the title of Ode, without any serious protest.

Some people, however, cannot, if they wish, write poetry. Moreover, many subjects can be handled much better in prose; so, as a race becomes more civilised and more literary, many forms of prose are perfected. All races at the beginning of their lives seem to compose verse most naturally, which suggests that poetry is the natural way in which "youth" can express itself; and therefore children, like young races, should by rights like, and not hate, it.

The forms of prose, on the whole, are not so easy to distinguish from each other as those of poetry. A general if clumsy name for a long discussion in prose of

some subject, or for a long explanatory statement about it, is *Treatise*. Again, there are matters to be written about, which though of great interest and importance are not bulky enough to fill a treatise. Such a concise, definitely planned, short setting forth in prose of a fact or related set of facts or opinions is called an Essay. The meaning of this word is trial or weighing, which really suggests the business of an Essay, which is to consider and judge some matter, to set out facts, reasons, and arguments and to draw a conclusion from them. The Essay thus has a clear purpose, and a more or less definite form: the name is not to be given to any short piece of prose, however rambling, and tumbling to pieces it may be.

It is not possible to describe the various forms which literature takes in their precise historical order, because different nations develop differently. But when some fair degree of skill has been reached, "action" is added to that which so far has been written down to be read, and so drama begins. The usual division into Tragedy, the play which moves on through sorrow, pain, calamity and fear to a disastrous ending, and Comedy, which deals with the more cheerful, lighter side of everyday human life, and invariably "ends happily"—this usual division does not cover everything which can be presented on the stage of a theatre, just because human life is not neatly and sharply divided like that into terrible and pleasant parts. So perhaps the English word "play" best suggests that form of literature wherein men and women are represented on the stage as acting, thinking, feeling creatures, but are taken at some moment of their lives when the story of all that works itself out, and so the reason of it, and its result, can be made plain, intelligible and enthralling to an audience in a comparatively short time. Of course, plays can be written in verse or prose; Shakespeare, as we all know, uses both forms in the compass of one play.

The rigidest form of poetry, the one most closely bound by rules, is the Sonnet. It can deal with almost

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any subject, but the form of it is, with a few variations, fixed. It must never contain less or more than fourteen lines. These lines are divided into two parts, the first eight being called the octave, the last six the sestet. In the strictest form the position of the rimes is fixed, but by English sonneteers this order is often neglected.

A Satire may be written in verse or prose. Its aim is to bring ridicule upon wrong-doing, or foolishness, or upon any form of moral failure. Sometimes it is intensely personal, and ridicules a stupid or vicious individual, or at any rate one who is taken to be so. However unpleasant or even cruel it may chance to be, the satirist assumes, and expects others to assume, that his purpose is to discourage at least, and, at best, to reform or destroy the person's capacity for wrong-doing, and not actually to destroy the person.

The Idyll, one of the most purely charming of literary forms, occasionally prose, but more often poetry, is a description of some beautiful or peculiarly interesting incident or scene. It is neither a narrative nor a lyric, but has some of the qualities of both.

Finally, there are people who have a story to tell, and who yet have not the playwright's gifts or specialised skill. Further, there are circumstances which are too complicated, and which develop too slowly to be squeezed into a play which could be acted on a stage in any reasonable length of time. So there has arisen in all literatures the form of prose story-telling. In early stages it probably takes the form of Romance, something between an Epic and the Novel which, as literary skill grows, is developed. All of these are stories drawn, more or less directly, from human life, in the present or the past, from the interplay of character, the unrolling of events, the causes and effects of human action and conduct. The novel is expected to have, as its main interest, human love; in recent years, in England, some writers have widened their subject matter, trying to include human life in all its ways and deeds, which is perhaps a return, more or less conscious, to the older Romance form.



To cover all possibilities we must remember that many poems have been written from time to time which cannot, strictly speaking, be called by any of these names—epic, lyric, etc. The only name which can be applied to these is “miscellaneous,” which does not carry us very far.

No one must suppose that these various forms grow up in a nation's literature in a fixed order. Some writers prefer one, their talents or genius being fitted for that, some another. There is no reason, so far as we know, why time, or a stage of development, should have any power to decide in what order men use them. On the whole, however, the history of the literatures of different nations would suggest that the epic, the ballad, and the lyric are, naturally, we may say, early forms in which men, at the beginning of a nation's life, express themselves. There seems to be in normal human beings an indigenous liking for both song and story. As men slowly grew what we call more civilised, more educated, the equally natural taste for change, for variety, shows itself, and then the more difficult and complicated forms of expression like the sonnet and the drama arise. The Satire is almost entirely a growth of a highly developed civilisation, springing as it does from emotions of dislike, disapproval, anger. Among primitive people, the normal outlet for such feelings, when men are unwilling or unable to contain themselves, is hard blows; while in the more polished, politer, if not so sincere and straightforward stages of a nation's life, barbed and stinging words give some people such relief. The Satire compared with the epic or the ballad is rather like the contrast between the poison gas of modern warfare when contrasted with the hand-to-hand scuffles of earlier days. A comparison is seldom exact or complete, but this one may suggest the nature and use of satire in literature, especially that of the bitterest satires.

How far a bare “history of literature” can be useful to anyone is a point on which people disagree. No one,

however, can deny that if it is a good thing to read good literature, it is also well to know something, at any rate, of the way and order in which it has come to us; something about the times and circumstances in which it was written, simply because literature is a picture more or less true, more or less inspiring, of actual life. That life is no simple affair, for first human nature, in its deeper feelings, its loves, hatreds, tempers, self-sacrifices, self-seekings and so forth, changes slowly as the centuries go by. We can see this if we will read the ancient literatures, the Old Testament of the Hebrews, Chinese Poetry of the eighth and following centuries before Christ, the Ramayana of India, the Greek Iliad and Odyssey. Everything loses something in a translation, but these great stories, even in an English dress, show us how like men and women of the old days were to us of to-day in all the big and deep qualities of human nature. And, secondly, in the more superficial thoughts and feelings, and specially in outward circumstances, changes are very easy to see as the story of mankind goes on. From generation to generation men's surroundings differ, and with them their lighter feelings, their everyday thoughts and opinions and tastes do alter; and all these changes show in their national literatures. The same piece of land is not always inhabited by the same race precisely. At one time this land which we now call England, as also a large part of Western Europe, seems, so far as scholars can make out, to have been populated by Iberians, who in time became so mixed with other and seemingly stronger races, that only the Basques of the Pyrenees now remain in Europe to represent the purest Iberian blood.

In England, the Iberians were overcome by a race of Celts, whose original home was in Asia. These Celts, Goidels as they were called, killed many of the Iberians, though they married some, and kept others in slavery. After a while, another swarm of Celts, Brythons, arrived, and apparently drove out the Goidels, at first to Ireland, whence, later, some made settlements in Wales, Scot-

land and the Isle of Man. From 55 B.C. the Britons were, for a time, more or less rigidly ruled by the Romans, who first arrived under Julius Cæsar. The British huts were replaced by orderly cities; and, as everywhere where they colonised, the Romans made magnificent roads, and gradually trade was begun.

So far as intellectual things go, we do not know very much of life in Britain before the fifth century: though we do know that Christianity was established there, because at the Council of the Western Bishops of the Catholic Church, held at Arles in 314, British bishops were present. Further, we know that the Phœnicians, who lived in the strip of coast north of Palestine, between the mountains of Lebanon and the Mediterranean Sea, were, in consequence of their position, fishermen and sailors. Later on they took to trading, and, joining the two crafts of sailor and merchant, they acted as carriers, not only of goods, but of knowledge and ideas, to all the countries round the Great Sea. Our island lay beyond their usual journeys, but about A.D. 330 a trade in tin (which has always been found in the counties of Devon and Cornwall) sprang up between Britain and the port of Marseilles, then called Massilia. Whether the Phœnicians began this trade, or whether it was started by Greek colonists in Marseilles, is not certain; anyhow, by the fourth century the Southern Britons were trading with Southern Gaul, and the long story of this country's foreign commerce had begun.

Further than all this, we know that, like all primitive races, the Britons had songs and stories about their great heroes, which persisted after the Romans had withdrawn at the beginning of the fifth century, leaving the Britons to fend for themselves. As a rule, they found this a most difficult task, since under the Roman rule they had lost some of their national feeling, because they might not manage their own affairs, nor conduct their lives in their own way. Their songs and stories survived, however, even after they were driven westwards by successive rushes of Sea-Rovers, from North-Western Europe.

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No one can hope to understand the literature of Britain unless he constantly remembers the incessant coming in, specially into England, of different races. As early as 731, the great monk of Jarrow, S. Bede, wrote in his *Ecclesiastical History* of this racial mixture:

Britain, an island in the ocean, formerly called Albion, is situated between the north and west, facing, though at a considerable distance, the coasts of Germany, France, and Spain, which form the greatest part of Europe. . . . This land at present contains five nations, the English, Britons, Scots, Picts, and Latins, each in its own particular dialect cultivating the sublime study of Divine truth. The Latin tongue is, by the study of the Scriptures, become common to all the rest.<sup>1</sup>

Early in the fifth century after Christ, only a shadow of Roman power remained in Britain, for the northern races of Europe had attacked the Empire, and every soldier was brought home to protect its heart; distant colonies, like Britain, mattering very little when the Imperial City itself was in danger.

During the Roman occupation of Britain, Saxons from the mouth of the River Elbe had plundered the eastern coasts. The Romans, not being sailors, had no fleet with which to drive off invaders from the sea. When the Romans left, the Britons, who vainly appealed to them for help, were left to struggle not only with the Saxons, but with the Picts, probably of Iberian race, from Scotland, and with the "Scots" who came from Ireland. From 449 onwards, hordes of Jutes, from Jutland, reinforced by more and more Saxons, and by Angles from Schleswig, overran Britain, till eventually the Britons were driven out to the West, to Cornwall, Wales, and overseas to Ireland, and up to Strathclyde.

The conquest of a country very rarely destroys all the original inhabitants, so, by the time that the "English" settlement was complete, there was a mixture of six races in Britain: the Britons with some Scots and Picts, and the three victorious peoples—Angles, Jutes, and Saxons.

<sup>1</sup> Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, ch. i.

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Henceforward till the Norman Conquest in 1066, with the further addition of some piratical Danes, who established themselves in a few spots on the East Coast, the race was principally "English," so the literature of this island from the end of the fifth to the middle of the eleventh centuries has a markedly Early English character, though it must not be forgotten that, after the re-introduction of Christianity in the South-East by S. Augustine, and in the North by S. Paulinus, all Church Services were in Latin, and educated people knew Latin. During these centuries, though the language is different enough from modern English to need translation, we find many of the regular forms of literature—*e.g.*, the epic, the prose treatise, the ballad, and at any rate the beginning of lyrical poems.

From 1066 to 1200, during the reigns of William I and William II, Henry I, Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I, the influence of Norman-French literature can be clearly seen in our own. During this period, a very important collection of Early English poems came into the hands of Bishop Leofric of Exeter, which he gave to his Cathedral Library. So to him we owe the preservation of some of the most interesting beginnings of our literature. William I, too, ordered a "survey" to be made of the whole country. The results were written in Domesday Book, which thus gives us much information about our early history and the ordinary everyday life of our ancestors.

Then, the early part of the twelfth century saw the production at Dunstable of a "Miracle Play," founded on the life of S. Catherine of Alexandria, who was still greatly venerated in the Middle Ages. Other Miracle Plays were performed in London later in the same century. Besides all this, there were many poetic tales and chronicles written. A curious fact about the twelfth century is that while French poets were busy making lyrics, Englishmen neglected these throughout it, though they produced many in the next. The Norman-French influenced Englishmen most by story-

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telling, and this was, with lyrics, the main work of the thirteenth century. The beginning of these stories, popularised at the end of the twelfth and throughout the thirteenth centuries, lies a long way back; some are certainly older than Christianity. So far as can be discovered, many of them spring from Wales. But whoever made them originally, they were borrowed and used by men of most European races, English, French, Spanish, Italian, German. Only the peoples of central and Eastern Europe, the "Slav" races, seem to have left them alone, save, oddly enough, the descendants of their makers, the Celts. They, as we know, had been driven out of the richer, more habitable parts of Europe, and in the cheerless mountain refuges, where they had found some measure of safety, they seem to have lost the will to enjoy their own old stories. One very ancient collection of such tales, not epical, because there is no really central person or event, came from Wales, and is older than Christianity. They were told or sung at feasts, and possibly on other occasions, by men called Bards. The great collection, called the *Mabinogion*, has been translated into English.<sup>1</sup> It is quite impossible to give any idea, in a small space like this book, of the main stories; but there are sometimes little complete stories, put into the middle of the bigger ones. Two of these will give a fair notion of this very human and entrancing Romance.

A famous chief, Pwyll, Prince of Dyved, had by his courage won the kingdom of the "Underworld." He and his wife, Rhiannon, had a son, called Pryderi, and he, after Pwyll's death, arranged that his mother should marry a chief called Manawyddan, the son of Llyr. After this marriage, Pryderi and his stepfather went a-hunting, and the following strange things befell:

One morning Pryderi and Manawyddan rose up to hunt, and they ranged their dogs and went forth from the palace. And some of the dogs ran before them and came to a small bush which was

<sup>1</sup> By Lady Charlotte Guest; published in the Everyman's Library now.



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near at hand; but as soon as they were come to the bush, they hastily drew back and returned to the men, their hair bristling up greatly. "Let us go near to the bush," said Pryderi, "and see what is in it." And as they came near, behold, a wild boar of a pure white colour rose up from the bush. Then the dogs, being set on by the men, rushed towards him; but he left the bush and fell back a little way from the men, and made a stand against the dogs without retreating from them, until the men had come near. And when the men came up, he fell back a second time, and betook him to flight. Then they pursued the boar until they beheld a vast and lofty castle, all newly built, in a place where they had never before seen either stone or building. And the boar ran swiftly into the castle and the dogs after him. Now when the boar and the dogs had gone into the castle, they began to wonder at finding a castle in a place where they had never before seen any building whatsoever. And from the top of the Gorsedd they looked and listened for the dogs. But so long as they were there they heard not one of the dogs nor aught concerning them.

"Lord," said Pryderi, "I will go into the castle to get tidings of the dogs." "Truly," he replied, "thou wouldst be unwise to go into this castle which thou hast never seen till now. If thou wouldst follow my counsel, thou wouldst not enter therein. Whosoever has cast a spell over this land has caused this castle to be here." "Of a truth," answered Pryderi, "I cannot thus give up my dogs." And for all the counsel that Manawyddan gave him, yet to the castle he went.

When he came within the castle, neither man nor beast, nor boar nor dogs, nor house nor dwelling saw he within it. But in the centre of the castle floor he beheld a fountain with marble work around it, and on the margin of the fountain a golden bowl upon a marble slab, and chains hanging from the air, to which he saw no end.

And he was greatly pleased with the beauty of the gold, and with the rich workmanship of the bowl, and he went up to the bowl and laid hold of it. And when he had taken hold of it his hands stuck to the bowl, and his feet to the slab on which the bowl was placed, and all his joyousness forsook him, so that he could not utter a word. And thus he stood.

And Manawyddan waited for him till near the close of the day. And late in the evening, being certain that he should have no tidings of Pryderi or of the dogs, he went back to the palace. And as he entered, Rhiannon looked at him. "Where," said she, "are thy companion and thy dogs?" "Behold," he answered, "the adventure that has befallen me." And he related it all unto her. "An evil companion hast thou been," said Rhiannon, "and a good companion hast thou lost." And with that word she went out, and proceeded towards the castle according to the direction which he gave her. The gate of the castle she found open. She was

nothing daunted and she went in. And as she went in, she perceived Pryderi laying hold of the bowl, and she went towards him. "O my lord," said she, "what dost thou do here?" And she took hold of the bowl with him, and as she did so her hands became fast to the bowl, and her feet to the slab, and she was not able to utter a word. And with that, as it became night, lo, there came thunder upon them, and a fall of mist, and thereupon the castle vanished, and they with it.

Another story, complete in itself, concerns the fate of Blodeuwedd. Gwydion, the brother of Math, lord of Gwynedd, was a famous Tribe-herdsman, who had magical power. He wished to find a wife for his nephew Llew, but he could not because Arianrod, Math's wife, hated the youth, and had laid a "destiny" on him that no human being could marry him. In his distress, Gwydion appealed to Math, who solved the problem by saying:

"Well, we will seek, I and thou, by charms and illusions, to form a wife for him out of flowers. He has come now to man's stature, and he is the comeliest youth that was ever beheld." So they took the blossoms of the oak, and the blossoms of the broom, and the blossoms of the meadow-sweet, and produced from them a maiden, the fairest and most graceful that man ever saw. And they baptized<sup>1</sup> her and gave her the name of Blodeuwedd.

Unfortunately, the wedding was not followed by a happy life, and presently, Blodeuwedd persuaded Llew's rival to slay him, through knowledge which she treacherously gained. As the dart of Gronw struck Llew "he flew up in the form of an eagle, and gave a fearful scream. And thenceforth he was no more seen." That, however, is not the story's end: treachery was only successful for the moment. Rumours reached Math and Gwydion, and the latter set out to discover if he could what had really befallen his nephew:

These tidings reached Math the son of Mathonwy. And heaviness and grief came upon Math, and much more upon Gwydion than upon him. "Lord," said Gwydion, "I shall never rest until I have

<sup>1</sup> These ancient stories, originally composed before Christian times, were, later, constantly written down or copied by Christian scribes, who occasionally put in Christian touches and details.



tidings of my nephew." "Verily," said Math, "may Heaven be thy strength." Then Gwydion set forth and began to go forward. And he went through Gwynedd and Powys to the confines. And when he had done so, he went unto Arvon, and came to the house of a vassal, in Mænawr Penardd. And he alighted at the house, and stayed there that night. The man of the house and his household came in, and last of all came there the swineherd. Said the man of the house to the swineherd, "Well, youth, hath thy sow come in to-night?" "She hath," said he, "and is this instant returned to the pigs." "Where doth this sow go to?" said Gwydion. "Every day, when the sty is opened, she goeth forth and none can catch sight of her, neither is it known whither she goeth more than if she sank into the earth." "Wilt thou grant unto me," said Gwydion, "not to open the sty until I am beside the sty with thee?" "This will I do, right gladly," he answered.

That night they went to rest, and as soon as the swineherd saw the light of day, he awoke Gwydion. And Gwydion arose and dressed himself, and went with the swineherd and stood beside the sty. Then the swineherd opened the sty. And as soon as he opened it, behold she leaped forth, and set off with great speed. And Gwydion followed her, and she went against the course of a river, and made for a brook, which is now called Nant y Llew. And there she halted and began feeding. And Gwydion came under the tree, and looked what it might be that the sow was feeding on. And he saw that she was eating putrid flesh and vermin. Then looked he up to the top of the tree, and as he looked he beheld on the top of the tree an eagle, and when the eagle shook itself, there fell vermin and putrid flesh from off it, and these the sow devoured. And it seemed to him that the eagle was Llew. And he sang an Englyn:—

"Oak that grows between the two banks;  
Darkened is the sky and hill!  
Shall I not tell him by his wounds,  
That this is Llew?"

Upon this the eagle came down until he reached the centre of the tree. And Gwydion sang another Englyn:—

"Oak that grows in upland ground;  
Is it not wetted by the rain? Has it not been drenched  
By nine score tempests?  
It bears in its branches Llew Llaw Gyffes."

Then the eagle came down until he was on the lowest branch of the tree, and thereupon this Englyn did Gwydion sing:—

"Oak that grows beneath the steep;  
Stately and majestic is its aspect!  
Shall I not speak to it?  
That Llew will come to my lap?"

And the eagle came down upon Gwydion's knee. And Gwydion struck him with his magic wand, so that he returned to his own form. No one ever saw a more pitcous sight, for he was nothing but skin and bone.

Then he went unto Caer Dathyl, and there were brought unto him good physicians that were in Gwynedd, and before the end of the year he was quite healed.

"Lord," said he unto Math the son of Mathonwy, "it is full time now that I have retribution of him by whom I have suffered all this woe." "Truly," said Math, "he will never be able to maintain himself in the possession of that which is thy right." "Well," said Llew, "the sooner I have my right, the better shall I be pleased."

Then, they called together the whole of Gwynedd, and set forth to Ardudwy. And Gwydion went on before and proceeded to Mur y Castell. And when Blodeuwedd heard that he was coming, she took her maidens with her and fled to the mountain. And they passed through the river Cynvacl, and went towards a court that there was upon the mountain, and through fear they could not proceed except with their faces looking backwards, so that unawares they fell into the lake. And they were all drowned except Blodeuwedd, and her Gwydion overtook. And he said unto her, "I will not slay thee, but I will do unto thee worse than that. For I will turn thee into a bird; and because of the shame thou hast done unto Llew Llaw Gyffes, thou shalt never show thy face in the light of day henceforth; and that through fear of all the other birds. For it shall be their nature to attack thee, and to chase thee from where-soever they may find thee. And thou shalt not lose thy name, but shalt always be called Blodeuwedd." Now Blodeuwedd is an owl in the language of this present time, and for this reason is the owl hateful unto all birds. And even now the owl is called Blodeuwedd.

In the fourteenth century, during the long reign of Edward III, and at the beginning of Richard II's reign, the Christian religion inspired and stimulated several great writers of prose, and particularly one Yorkshireman, Richard Rolle, who with Walter Hilton and Mother Julian of Norwich left us very beautiful books full of teaching and devotion. Richard Rolle's prose is not only almost the earliest continuous writing in English, but it has a lovely musical cadence. In this century another remarkable man, William Langland, managed to throw off foreign influences and wrote a long poem called *The Vision of Piers the Plowman*, which gives us a vivid picture of the doings and thoughts of our forefathers, not only those of the "important"

people, but of the quite ordinary very average folk, who must always make up the bulk and real body of any nation.

Towards the end of the fourteenth century, the love of learning which had risen up in Italy made itself felt in France, and then in England. Literature began to flourish, and the influence of Italian thought, stories, character-drawing, began to appear, in England, and can be seen very easily in such poems as Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, in spite of their English setting and homely English fun; and especially in Sonnets, such as Sir Philip Sidney's and Shakespeare's. This Italian influence continued through the reigns of Elizabeth and James I, and was equally visible in poems, plays, and in essays and other prose forms.

Then during the Civil War under Charles I, prose took another shape; both Cavaliers and Roundheads wrote controversial pamphlets, swords and words alike came handy as weapons to the fighters on both sides.

But in the midst of all the noise of war, there was born in the later half of the seventeenth century a taste for beautiful, gentle, reflective, peaceful poetry, than which no century has brought forth any more fragrant, and more lovely in its own particular kind. It may be that the tumult and horror of war caused it, in one of those "reactions," as we call them, which are moods of escape into the exact opposite of the circumstances naturally around us.

The eighteenth century produced the liveliest and, on the whole, the bitterest satires written in English. But we must remember that the satire goes very far back in English Literature; for instance, *The Land of Cockayne* was written in 1268. The plays written at this time were mostly prose comedies. The century is also distinguished by the production of much prose, on all sorts of subjects—religion, government, social life, the working of the human mind, morals, the affairs of trade and so forth. Perhaps we may say that it was a very "grown-up" century; and the greater part of

## THE "FORMS" OF LITERATURE

the books written were certainly not meant for, nor likely to entertain, children.

The nineteenth century began with a great outburst of youthful work, as if people had tired of being chilly and elderly. The rising tide of song swelled as the years passed on, and with it, and beside it, grew up an immense variety of essays, treatises, novels, histories, biographies: though a great number of plays were written and played at the theatres, nothing great, like the drama which began with Kit Marlowe and was carried on by Shakespeare, and died away after the days of Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher and Webster, was produced; nothing which was even to be compared with the witty drama of the Restoration days, when Charles II was King. The reason may be that many more novels were written, and that the writers of Queen Victoria's days found themselves more at home writing these than making plays.

With this very short and sketchy general outline of the growth of English Literature we must be content, and turn to the literature itself, dealing with it under the several forms which I tried earlier in this chapter to describe. But one of these forms—that of the novel—cannot be treated here. Extracts from any novel would be but an example of prose. A novel is a developing story, and if it is worth telling, it cannot be usefully represented by small bits cut out of it, however beautiful in themselves such fragments may be.

## CHAPTER II

### THE EPIC

**I**N the beginnings of our national life, our forefathers called poets "smiths of song." These men were entertainers at feasts. As the ale or mead was passed round in a great cup, among the warriors who feasted and rested after the day's work and fighting, these Singers recited stories, or sang to the sound of a harp, songs of great deeds and hairbreadth escapes of their heroes, dead or living. A king would have a minstrel of his own, generally a man of high rank, attached to the Court, who was called a *Scóp*, which comes from the Old English verb, to shape, or create, because he made his own songs, partly out of old traditions, and partly out of passing events.

As a race, we have one great Epic of our early days, named, after the hero, *Beowulf*. It falls into four divisions, of which the first two tell of his fight with an appalling being, Grendel, and with Grendel's mother. None of the people mentioned in it lived in England; the poem calls them *Geatas* (Goths); they lived probably in the southern part of Sweden called Götaland. We have only to look at the map of Northern Europe to see that they could look out on the Baltic Sea on the East, while when they had passed round the North of Denmark they would find themselves in the wild North Sea.

No one doubts that the original story of *Beowulf* belongs to Scandinavia, but there is nothing really known about the one manuscript we possess (now in the British Museum) except that it belongs to the tenth century. The story is several hundred years older than the manuscript. Scholars, on the whole, think that it was a story

known to all the North European tribes, who, with the exception of the Huns, were, however much they fought and squabbled, probably at bottom all of one kin. So far as we can now tell, after so many centuries, the English pirates, who drove the native Britons to the West, and themselves occupied the South, Midlands, and North of this island, brought the Götaland story with them, the story they were accustomed to tell or to sing over their mead-cups. When they and those who came with or followed them had settled down comfortably, they still treasured their old family stories (we have a fragment, about fifty lines, of another called *The Fight at Finnesburg*), and they were sung and told in the tribal manner at feasts, till at last some Englishman of the tenth century wrote Beowulf down. He, if not a Christian, could easily know about Christianity, which may account for ideas and details scattered about this pagan poem which its original makers would never have put in.

*Beowulf* is most likely the oldest written story in any North European tongue; it is, or should be, a source of pride to us that it was written in our own. But it is not only old, it is also alive and vivid; its men have the same qualities which we still pride ourselves that we possess; it has our own love of the sea and of wild moor and mountain country; it is full of strength, endurance, manly courage, and, above all, of truth speaking and loyalty.

In the first canto we learn that Hrothgar, Healfdene's second son, succeeded, on his brother's death, to the throne of the Scyldings, and very soon determined to build a great palace:

To him in mind it came to command  
Men to build a hall-dwelling, a mighty mead-house,  
Of which the children of men should ever know.  
And there within it he should share out all things,  
As God had given to him, save the public share  
Of all the people, and the souls of men.

\* \* \* \* \*

He who wielded widely power of his words  
Gave to it the name Heorot.

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Trouble soon befell, since Hrothgar not only kept to his plan of distributing rewards and gifts, but encouraged the warriors to meet and feast in the great mead-hall. Their joyful noises aroused the wrath of a terrible enemy, Grendel, who, by a curious mixture of Jewish and North European thought, is represented as a descendant of Cain, who, having murdered his brother, thereby became, as it were, the parent of all murderers. Grendel was a night-time fiend:

On each of the days he heard rejoicing  
Loud in the hall; there was the harp's sound  
And the minstrel's clear song.

Such pleasure, comfort and merriment were intolerable to

The grim guest called Grendel  
The mighty march-stepper who held  
The moors, fen and fastness.

Hidden by darkness, Grendel entered the Ring-Danes' Hall, when the warriors, fully satisfied with food and mirth, slept securely:

Grim and greedy, ready was he soon,  
Rugged and wrathful; in their rest  
He snatched away thirty thanes.

Grendel made these raids nightly, carrying away and devouring Hrothgar's nobles, until those who remained at last went to rest elsewhere:

So Grendel reigned, against right contended,  
One alone against all, till empty stood  
The most excellent of houses.

After twelve years of this miserable struggle between Hrothgar and his Scyldings on the one side, and Grendel on the other, the King's nephew, Beowulf, who ruled West Gothland, heard of his uncle's plight, and set out to go across the sea to Denmark to his help. After an adventurous voyage, he reached Heorot and was brought



## THE EPIC

to Hrothgar, who, by this time, after so many troubles, had grown, so the poet declares,

. . . old and hairless.

The young Beowulf thus addressed his aged and weary kinsman :

Hail be thou Hrothgar, Hygelac's kinsman I,  
Kinsman and comrade: I, in my youth,  
Have many great actions undertaken.  
To me, on my native turf, the matter  
Of Grendel was manifestly made known.  
Sea-farers say that this hall stands,  
This best of houses, empty and useless,  
To every one of the warriors, after evening-light  
Is hidden under heaven's night-silence.

Beowulf, having thus recalled his past victories, offered Hrothgar his help. The latter accepted it gladly, and, once more, hoping for a return of their old joys, the warriors sat down to feast in the great mead-hall. But the feast's joy was marred by the jealousy of one of Hrothgar's thanes, Hunferth:

To him the voyage of Beowulf, the bold sea-farer,  
Was mighty displeasure, because he would not allow  
That any other man under the heavens  
Should ever have, on this middle-earth,  
More renown than he himself.

However, this poor creature's unworthy sneer that Beowulf had been beaten by Breca, in a swimming match, is responsible for one of the great sea-pictures in the poem, pictures which must ever delight a sea-loving race like ours. Beowulf showed the warriors how, in this friendly bout, he and Breca had found common foes in the deadly sea-creatures:

When on the narrow sea we rowed,  
A naked sword had we hard in hand,  
We thought to war against the whale-fishes.

\* \* \* \* \*

Then together were we, on the sea,  
The space of five nights, until the flood,



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\*  
The welling waves, coldest of storms  
Darkening night, and the northern wind  
Drove us apart, battle-grim turned against us.  
Rough rose the billows, the sea-fishes' rage  
Was roused. My body-shirt, hard,  
Hand-locked, help afforded me against my foes.

\* \* \* \* \*  
To the bottom, a foe, a dire fiend, tugged me,  
Fast had me, grim in his grasp;  
Yet was it granted to me, miserable man,  
That with my point, my war-sword, I reached  
The mighty mere-beast: with my own hand  
A battle-rush destroyed.

\* \* \* \* \*  
Thus often, my hated foes threatened me heavily:  
I, with my dear sword, served them  
As was fitting. Joy of that glut—that they  
Should eat me—those wicked doers had not,  
Sitting round their feast, nigh the sea-bottom;  
But in the morning, with falchions wounded,  
Among the sea-drift, along they lay  
In crowds put to sleep,  
So that nevermore have they hindered  
The sea-farers' way about the foaming ford.

\* \* \* \* \*  
When his courage holds, Wyrð<sup>1</sup> often saves  
The undoomed man: so 'twas given to me  
With my sword to slay the nickers.<sup>2</sup>

After the feast, during the course of which Wealtheow,  
the Queen, had handed round the mead-cup—

Suddenly, Healfdene's son his evening rest  
Would seek.

Slyly, the poet suggests that Hrothgar was not wholly  
unmindful of the danger of staying too late in that  
fiend-ravaged hall, when—

Murky night, Creation's shadow-helmet came  
Wandering over all things.

---

<sup>1</sup> Wyrð, to our forefathers, was a power who ruled the fortunes  
of men, who, though not absolutely supreme, was to them terrible  
in her might.

<sup>2</sup> In Northern mythology, nickers were devils who lived in the sea.

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Before he went to take his rest, Hrothgar confided Heorot to Beowulf's care:

Never to any man, ere this, have I  
Since hand and shield I might raise  
Entrusted the Danes' meeting-hall, save now to thee.

Thus left alone, with his own followers, Beowulf stripped himself of sword and armour, intending to meet Grendel weaponless, hand-to-hand, and laid himself down on his bed, surrounded by his sailor-warriors. But not one of them, remembering the tales of horror told of that hall, thought, as he turned to sleep,

That he should thence ever seek his loved home again.

Beowulf and his companions had not long to wait. In the dimness of the Northern night, over the pathless wastes of boggy moorland,

Came from the moor, under misty hills  
Grendel ganging.

For a moment, the hideous foe stood in that "golden, richly variegated hall of men," gloating over his prey; "laughed in his mind" as he contemplated their coming destruction. Stealthily, he stretched out his hand, and seized

A sleeping Warrior, slit him unawares,  
Bit his bone-casings, drank his veins' blood,  
Swallowed him in continual rendings,—

with such dreadfully real details did our ancestors describe the terror of this unequal, supernatural struggle. Next, Grendel chanced on Beowulf himself, but, realising at the first grips that he had met too strong a man, his heart failed him, and he thought of flight. Beowulf's companions, snatching up their arms, came to their lord's help, only to find that mortal weapons would not enter the marsh-fiend's body. But Beowulf with his own hands burst the sinews and "bone-casings" of Grendel's shoulder, and the fiend fled to find his fen-dwelling, leaving his hand, arm and shoulder—"Grendel's

grasp"—in Beowulf's clutch, fled away, down through the blood-stained, boiling surge of the sea, to die beneath the waves. Four cantos then tell of the joy in Heorot, of its restoration, after twelve years of misery, to its old splendours, of the feasting and praising of Beowulf, on whom Wealtheow, the Queen, bestowed a rich and beautiful collar and mantle.

After the feast, Hrothgar, as before, retired, leaving the Goth warriors to sleep in the Danes' hall, though Beowulf, after receiving his costly gifts, slept elsewhere.

Grendel was dead, any place now was safe for sleep, so the warriors joyfully thought as they sank to rest securely. What they had not realised was that Grendel's mother,

Woman, wretched woman, mindful of misery,

lived still, and,

Greedy and gallows-minded,

was already far on her way to Heorot to avenge her son. Unlike Grendel, who entered the hall silently, his mother "rushed in," whereupon the startled warriors awoke and seized their arms. Terrified, she turned and fled, seizing, as she went, a noble, Æschere, Hrothgar's chosen friend and counsellor. When morning dawned, Hrothgar, hearing what had happened, and filled with grief, remembered how his Danes had told him that, from time to time, they had seen on the moors two vast figures, "march-stalkers," one like a man, the other like a woman; Grendel and his mother, whose dwelling, "not a mile distant," was "in the flood under the earth." Once more, he begged Beowulf's help, asking him to slay "this wretched crone," offering him in recompense "money and twisted gold." Beowulf answered in words which ring bravely still, and which, spoken or unspoken, have been in the minds of all Englishmen face to face with a great peril:

Each one of us must await the end of earthly life;  
Let him, who can, work glories before death.  
To the lifeless warrior that, afterwards, shall be best.

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Accompanied this time by Hrothgar and his thanes, Beowulf set out to reconnoitre; the poet pictures vividly the scene, just by the dreadful water underneath which the monster lay; a place of "deep rocky gorges . . . precipitous headlands, nicker-houses many." Beowulf, leading the way—

Suddenly found mountain trees, a joyless wood  
Leaning o'er the hoar rock,  
Water beneath stood gory and troubled.

\* \* \* \* \*

The band sat down, saw there along the water  
Of the Worm-races many, dreadful sea-dragons. . . .  
Also on the ness<sup>1</sup>-lurking-places, nickers lying,  
Who at morning-prime often pursue  
Their sorrowful path on the sea-road.

Undaunted, clad in his "byrnie," or corslet of mail, cunningly twisted and variegated, so strong that no enemy hand could penetrate to his body, with a helmet "beset with forms of swine," so wrought that no blade could cut it, and carrying a "hafted falchion," named Hrunting,

Its edge was iron, stained with twig-poison,  
Never in battle had it failed any man,

Beowulf plunged down into the boiling, "worm"-filled sea, down to the cave beneath the waves, to find the dwelling of the sea-beast. For the length of a day he descended, but before he reached the bottom, Grendel's mother seized him, and though her deadly grip could not pierce his armour, she bore him down to the sea's bed. There he found himself in a roofed hall, walled in from the waters:

A light of fire he saw, a pallid flame.

By its light, he could see his foe, and he rushed upon her with Hrunting—

Withheld not swing of sword, so that on her head  
The ringed blade sang a horrid war-song.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ness, a headland, as in Sheer-ness.

But it was all in vain: the sword which never before had failed, was useless against "the ground-wolf, the mighty sea-woman." Like many an Englishman since, Beowulf flung from him the useless tool, and trusting to his wrestler's strength and his two fists, he came to hand-grips with the creature. But she was the stronger, and pressed him down upon the floor. Just as she was drawing her poniard to give him the stab which was to avenge her son's death Beowulf saw, among the arms lying about, a magic sword forged long ago by giant monsters,

Of weapons choicest.

In his extremity, he seized on this blade, and drove it desperately against her neck, so that

It gripped her hard, her bone-rings brake,  
The bill passed right through her fated flesh-house;  
On the floor she sank, gory was the sword.  
The warrior rejoiced in his work.  
The light shone; within, the light stood even as  
From heaven serenely shines the sky's candle.

The warriors watching above the sea, saw the blood rise to the surface, but Beowulf did not come. He was searching the sea-woman's dwelling. At last, he had finished, and dived up through the sea to his fellows, bringing with him none of the treasures, nothing save the haft of the sword which had saved him, for the monster's hot blood had melted the blade.

All his life long Beowulf was fighting; his last exploit in his old age was to conquer a dragon, who sat upon treasures so ancient that none knew their age, or what prince had laid them there. The dragon sat always on them; if anyone came to take them away, he breathed out glowing embers.

As before, in the old days at Heorot, Beowulf set out alone; but when the dragon was obviously worsting him, one of his young warriors, Wigláf, who loved him and could bear the sight no longer, "waded through the deadly reek" to his lord's assistance, crying:

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God in me knows that I would liefer  
That fire should clasp my life-house<sup>1</sup>  
With that of my Giver of gold.<sup>2</sup>

Seeing this help coming, "the worm grew angry."  
Beowulf lifted his sword—not Hrunting, which had  
failed him and was left long ago in the depths of the sea,  
in the sea-woman's hall, but Nægling—

An ancient and grey brand.

But this, too, failed him; "Nægling bit less strongly,"  
and the "worm" rushed on him, clasping the old  
warrior's neck with his "bitter bones." Beowulf, with  
a desperate effort—

Called his wits into service, drew his slaughter-knife,  
Scored the worm across his middle,

and so won his last fight. But poisoned beyond recovery  
by the "worm's" venomous breath, which had made  
a "wound deadly livid," Beowulf fell back dying. He  
despatched Wigláf to fetch the treasure, reminding him  
that death has no real terror for a warrior who has  
fought his fight faithfully:

On earth I have suffered many changes,  
Held my own well, sought no unjust strifes,  
Nor sworn many oaths unrighteously.  
Sick with mortal wounds, I, for all this, may  
Have joy because the Ruler of men  
When my life at last leaves my body  
Need not upbraid me with murder of kins-men.

Wigláf returned with the treasures only just in time,  
and Beowulf, having charged him to see that the treasure-  
hoard, bought with their overlord's life, should be given  
to the people, took leave of his gallant young thane:

The bold-hearted prince next doffed from his neck,  
A golden circlet, to his thane he gave it,  
His gold-hued helmet too; his bracelet and corslet,  
Bade him bear them well. . . .

---

<sup>1</sup> The human body.

<sup>2</sup> Beowulf, his overlord, who gave him costly gifts.

"Thou, of our race art the last remnant,  
Of the Wæg-mundings: all my kinsmen, Wyrð  
Has swept away, earls in their valour; after them I go."  
That was the aged one's latest word.

That the people, who were his first and last care, were not unworthy of their chief, is shown by their refusal to keep the treasure: they burned it on Beowulf's funeral pyre:

They left Earls' treasure for Earth to hold,  
Gold in the dust: there it still remains,  
To men as useless as ever it was.

*Beowulf* is a great story of strife, greatly told. But that is not all which can be said. It is no small honour to our race that this primitive tale should deal not with the kind of struggle which issues from mankind's meaner motives, but with that age-long, unending war between good and evil, the fight of human courage and uprightness against tremendous and partly unknown, unfathomed powers of darkness, sin and dreadful unearthly strength.

It is full, too, of the main characteristics of our race—love of home, of kin; love of wild nature; loyalty, valour and deathless devotion. Its scorn of material goods when set above truth and honour, has been born again in all generations of our history; its loathing of treachery and underhand tricks is reproduced, through the ages, in every man or woman who still deserves the English name. This, then, is our great Epic, coming to us, not originally from English soil, but as it was brought by our forefathers from the Continent, and adopted and written down in our own land.

When we turn to Ireland we find an Epic which sprang up from the soil and race of Ireland, the *Táin Bó Cúalnge*,<sup>1</sup> which is probably older even than *Beowulf*, older than any other West European Epic.

According to Irish tradition King Conchabar<sup>2</sup> of

<sup>1</sup> Pronounced as nearly as possible Thawin' bō Cūln'ya.

<sup>2</sup> Pronounced Connahóor.

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Ulster died of sorrow when he heard of our Lord's crucifixion. He was the first consort of Medb,<sup>1</sup> Queen of Ulster, who afterwards took as her consort Ailill.<sup>2</sup>

The story of the *Táin* centres round the struggle for a famous bull, for which Medb and Cuchulain<sup>3</sup> strove. Cuchulain was the son of Lug, the Irish Sun-god, and Conchabar's sister, Dechtire. Cuchulain's real name was Setanta; but while he was quite a boy he killed a dog which belonged to Culann, the Smith; and so, in place of the blood-fine, which in Irish law was due from one who had committed murder, he was nicknamed Cuchulain, the Hound of Culann. Traditions about his age are contradictory; the most startling declares that he wore arms from the age of seven, fought Queen Medb when he was seventeen, and died when he was twenty-seven. Another story, from a manuscript in Trinity College, Dublin, declares that he lived to be fifty-nine. It seems to be fairly generally agreed that he was only seventeen when he declined to give Queen Medb his famous Brown Bull.

If anyone finds it strange that one of the world's oldest Epics, one of the great stories of the world should be woven round a cattle raid, the reason is not difficult to give. Always and still, Ireland, from her geographical position, is a land of pasture. Her soil is far better adapted to cattle-breeding than to crop-raising. Her real wealth is, and in the very earliest times was, in cattle. Briefly told, this is the tale of the *Táin*.

As, in ancient Ireland, married women kept those goods which they possessed when they were single as well as the dowry which, on marriage, they received from their father, Queen Medb naturally kept hers when she married Ailill. One night they disputed about the value of their respective goods. As they could not agree, the two sets of possessions were collected and

<sup>1</sup> Pronounced Maeve.

<sup>2</sup> Pronounced Ayeleel.

<sup>3</sup> Pronounced Cuhúlin.



reckoned up. From the *Táin*'s description it must have been an odd spectacle:<sup>1</sup>

Then were brought to them the least precious of their possessions, that they might know which of them had the more treasures, riches and wealth. Their pails and their cauldrons, and their iron-wrought vessels, their jugs, and their keeves,<sup>2</sup> and their eared pitchers were brought to them. Likewise their rings and their golden treasures were fetched to them, and their apparel, both purple and blue and black and green, yellow, vari-coloured and grey, dun, mottled and brindled.

Their numerous flocks of sheep were led in from fields and meads and plains. These were counted and compared, and found to be equal, of like size, of like number: however, there was an uncommonly fine ram over Medb's sheep, and he was of the value of a bondmaid,<sup>3</sup> but a corresponding ram was over the ewes of Ailill.

Their horses and steeds and studs were brought from pastures and paddocks. There was a noteworthy horse in Medb's herd, and he was of the value of a bondmaid; a horse to match was found among Ailill's.

Then were their numerous droves of swine driven from woods and shelving glens and wolds. These were numbered and counted and claimed. There was a noteworthy boar with Medb, and yet another with Ailill.

Next they brought before them their droves of cattle, and their herds and their roaming flocks from the brakes and wastes of the province.

These were counted and numbered and claimed, and were the same for both, equal in size, equal in number, except only there was an especial bull of the bawn<sup>4</sup> of Ailill, and he was a calf of one of Medb's cows, and Finnbennach ("The White-horned") was his name.

All this motley assemblage of pots, pans, raiment, jewels and stock were all arranged, counted and numbered. It was all equal, save for "The White-

<sup>1</sup> There are several MSS. of the *Táin*, which is partly in prose, partly in verse, and partly in what may be called rhythmical prose. All extracts here are taken from a translation into English, from the Irish, by Professor Joseph Dunn, of the Roman Catholic University at Washington. Mr. David Nutt published it in 1914.

<sup>2</sup> Big tubs.

<sup>3</sup> The Irish used cattle as *money*, or a measure of value. The worth of this ram is seen to be great when we realise that sometimes the price of a female slave was three head of cattle.

<sup>4</sup> An enclosure for cattle.

horned," the beautiful Bull of Ailill. Since he was a calf from Medb's herd, all might perhaps have been well but for the reason which brought Finnbennach from Medb's herd to Ailill's: "he, deeming it no honour to be in a woman's possession, had left and gone over to the kine of the King. And it was the same to Medb as if she owned not a pennyworth, forasmuch as she had not a bull of his size amongst her cattle."

This story, as old as the beginning of the Christian era, may serve among many other uses and delights, to show us that human nature does not change much with the passing of the ages.

Medb, not knowing what to do, summoned her chief messenger, macRoth, who told her that Darè, chieftain of Cualnge, in Ulster, owned a Brown Bull "that is best and better again." So Medb sent macRoth with some companions to bargain with the Ulster chieftain. The messengers prospered; small wonder, for Medb's offer was handsome enough. The Brown Bull was to be but a loan, and his hire fifty heifers: while if Darè would bring, instead of sending, the creature, Medb promised him as much land in her Connacht as he owned in Ulster, a chariot worth thrice seven bondmaids, and her personal friendship. Darè's joy was so great that he leaped "so that the seams of his flock-bed rent in twain beneath him." The Bull was promised. But, unfortunately, instead of starting off at once, they all fell to feasting, and we learn that "soon they were noisy and drunken," and the messengers of Medb began to quarrel as to which were the better man, Conchabar or Darè; and they ended up by declaring that had Darè not consented to lend the Bull, it should have been taken from him by force. This rudeness was repeated to Darè, so he came to ask Medb's messengers if it were true, and finding that it was, he straightway refused to send or take the Bull. In vain macRoth pleaded that his companions were drunk with Darè's own ale, and that anyway the chief should pay no heed to them. The Ulster leader would not yield. So macRoth went

back, and told Medb what had happened. The Queen wasted few words:

"There is no need to polish knots over such affairs as that, macRoth; for it was known that if the Brown Bull of Cualnge would not be given with their will, he would be taken in their despite, and taken he shall be!"

Thus the refusal of the Bull was the cause of the great struggle, described in the *Táin Bó Cúalnge*.

Queen Medb assembled not only her own Connacht men, but allies from all parts of Ireland. Cormac, Conchabar's eldest son, brought three troops. The description of these is not only beautiful in itself, but interesting as showing ancient Irish war-gear:

Cormac had three companies which came to Cruachan.<sup>1</sup> Before all, the first company. A covering of close-shorn black hair upon them. Green mantles and many-coloured cloaks wound about them; therein silvern brooches. Tunics of thread of gold next to their skin, reaching down to their knees, with interweaving of red gold. Bright-handled swords they bore, with guards of silver. Long shields they bore, and there was a broad grey spear-head on a slender shaft in the hand of each man. "Is that Cormac, yonder?" all and everyone asked. "Not he, indeed," Medb made answer.

The second troop. Newly shorn hair they wore and manes on the back of their heads, fair, comely indeed. Dark blue cloaks they all had about them. Next to their skin, gleaming-white tunics, with red ornamentation reaching down to their calves. Swords they had with round hilts of gold and silvern fist-guards, and shining shields upon them, and five-pronged spears in their hands. "Is yonder man Cormac?" all the people asked. "Nay, verily, that is not he," Medb made answer.

Then came the last troop. Hair cut broad they wore; fair-yellow, deep-golden, loose-flowing back hair down to their shoulders upon them. Purple cloaks, fairly bedizened about them; golden, embellished brooches over their breasts; and they had curved shields, with sharp, chiselled edges around them and spears as long as the pillars of a king's house in the hand of each man. Fine long silken tunics with hoods they wore to the very instep. Together they raised their feet, and together they set them down again. "Is that Cormac, yonder?" asked all. "Ay, it is he, this time," Medb made answer.

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<sup>1</sup> Pronounced Crochan: it was the ancient capital, and also the burying-place of the Kings of Connacht, in County Roscommon.

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It is a fine pageant, with the richness of colour, so dear to the Irish heart, the burnished silver, the gleaming gold, and the rhythmical sound of the marching of many men.

Though she was supported by so great a host, Medb could not make up her mind to start until she had taken counsel with her "druid," the man who could look into the future. He promised that at any rate Medb should return in safety. Her charioteer was not satisfied, and he asked the Queen's leave to turn the chariot round to the right, in the hope that they might see some omen which should assure them that the druid was telling the truth. When he had so turned, the Queen

espied a thing which surprised her. A lone virgin of marriageable age, standing on the hind pole of a chariot, a little way off, drawing nigh her. And thus the maiden appeared: wearing lace was she, and in her right hand was a bordering rod of silvered bronze, with its seven strips of red gold at the sides. A many-spotted green mantle around her; a bulging, strong-headed pin of gold in the mantle over her bosom; a hooded tunic, with red interweaving about her. A ruddy, fair-faced countenance she had, narrow below and broad above. She had a blue-grey and laughing eye, each eye had three pupils. Dark and black were her eyebrows; the soft black lashes threw a shadow to the middle of her cheeks. Red and thin were her lips. Shining and pearly were her teeth; thou couldst believe they were showers of white pearls that had rained into her head. Like to fresh, Parthian crimson were her lips. As sweet as the strings of lutes, when long sustained they are played by master-players' hands, was the melodious sound of her voice and her fair speech.

As white as snow in one night fallen was the sheen of her skin, and her body that shone outside of her dress. Slender and very white were her feet; rosy, even, sharp-round nails she had; two sandals with golden buckles about them. Fair-yellow, long-golden hair she wore; three braids of hair she wore; two tresses were wound around her head; the other tress from behind threw a shadow down on her calves. The maiden carried arms, and two black horses were under her chariot.

This fair woman was a prophetess and a Connacht poetess: but she did not prophesy smooth things. Six times over, in reply to Medb's question,

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"Tell, O Fedelm, prophet maid,  
How beholdest thou our host?"

she answered:

"Crimson red from blood they are;  
I behold them bathed in red."

Then, though Medb protested that the Ulstermen were "in their pains,"<sup>1</sup> and therefore could not be dangerous to a host like hers, Fedelm predicted that Cuchulain would destroy the Connacht army:

"Fair of deeds the man I see;  
Wounded sore is his fair skin;  
On his brow shines hero's light;  
Victory's seat is in his face.

\* \* \* \*

I know not who is the hound,  
Culann's hight, of fairest fame;  
But I know full well this host  
Will be smitten red by him.

\* \* \* \*

His Gae Bulga<sup>2</sup> too he wields,  
With his sword and javelin.  
Lo, the man in red cloak girt,  
Sets his foot on every hill.

\* \* \* \*

All your host he'll smite in twain,  
Till he works your utter ruin."

Relying, in spite of this, on the Ulstermen's "pains," Medb's host went on; soon they encountered Cuchulain. He and Medb agreed that the Connacht army should proceed, if, every day, one of their champions came out and fought single-handed with him. In these contests, Cuchulain was always victorious, and, thus, he slew

<sup>1</sup> Conchabar and his followers had done wrong aforetime to the goddess Macha; as a punishment, they suffered from time to time from a strange weakness which unfitted them for action. As a rule, it lasted four nights and five days; but during Medb's invasion, it lasted about three months, and the defence of Ulster fell on Cuchulain. He and his father were not laid under this curse.

<sup>2</sup> Only Cuchulain could handle this barbed spear.

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many of the most famous Connacht warriors, including, to his own great grief, his foster-brother, Ferdiad, with whom he fought for four whole days. The *Táin* describes Cuchulain as he approached Ferdiad:

In the front of the chariot is a man with fair, curly, long hair. There is around him a cloak, blue, Parthian purple. A spear with red, keen-cutting blades, flaming red in his hand. The semblance of three heads of hair he had, namely, brown hair next to the skin of his head, blood-red hair in the middle, a crown of gold is the third head of hair.

Beautiful is the arrangement of that hair, so that it makes three coils down behind over his shoulder. Even as a thread of gold it seems, when its hue has been wrought over the edge of an anvil: or like to the yellow of bees whereon shines the sun on a summer's day is the shining of each single hair of his hair. Seven toes he has on each of his feet, and seven fingers on each of his hands, and the brilliance of a very great fire is around his eye.

\* \* \* \* \*

And Cuchulain reached the ford.

Some idea of the terrific struggle which raged for four days, first with one weapon and then with another, before Cuchulain overthrew Ferdiad, is given by this description:

Such was the closeness of the combat they made, that the boccanach and the bananach ('the puck-faced Fays' and 'the white-faced Fays') and the sprites of the glens and the eldritch beings of the air screamed from the rims of their shields, and from the guards of their swords, and from the tips of their spears.

For a while Ferdiad seemed to be the stronger, and Cuchulain cried:

"O Ferdiad, thou hast a horn-skin . . . and thou hast not shown me how it is closed or how it is opened."

At last Cuchulain, really driven to the utmost, called for his famous barbed spear, Gae Bulga.<sup>1</sup> Laeg, in whose charge it was, "set it" in the stream to make it ready for the battle, and then he "sent it to Cuchulain

<sup>1</sup> This spear, on entering a body, spread out into thirty barbs.

along the stream." Even armed with this, the son of the Sun-god resorted to a stratagem:

When Ferdiad saw that his gilla<sup>1</sup> had been thrown, and heard the Gae Bulga called for, he thrust his shield down to protect the lower part of his body. Cuchulain gripped the short spear which was in his hand, cast it off the palm of his hand over the rim of the shield, and over the edge of the corselet and horn-skin, so that its farther half was visible after piercing his heart in his bosom. Ferdiad gave a thrust of his shield upwards to protect the upper part of his body, though it was help that came too late. The gilla set the Gae Bulga down the stream, and Cuchulain caught it in the fork of his foot, and when Ferdiad raised his shield, Cuchulain threw the Gae Bulga as far as he could cast underneath at Ferdiad, so that it passed through the strong, thick, iron apron of wrought iron, and broke in three parts the huge, goodly stone the size of a mill-stone, so that it cut its way through the body's protection into him, till every joint and every limb was filled with its barbs.

"Ah, that now sufficeth," sighed Ferdiad: "I am fallen of that! But, yet one thing more: mightily didst thou drive with thy right foot. And 'twas not fair of thee for me to fall by thy hand."

\* \* \* \*

Thereupon Cuchulain hastened towards Ferdiad and clasped his two arms about him, and bore him with all his arms and his armour and his dress northwards over the ford, so that it should be with his face to the north (*i.e.*, in Ulster) of the ford the triumph took place, and not to the west of the ford to the men of Erin (*i.e.*, in Connacht). Cuchulain laid Ferdiad there on the ground, and a cloud and a faint and a swoon came over Cuchulain, there by the head of Ferdiad.

Then, in song, Cuchulain lamented over Ferdiad, his foster-brother, in one of the earliest of a long line of beautiful elegies over the dead:

"Ah, Ferdiad betrayed to death,  
Our last meeting, oh, how sad!  
Thou to die, I to remain,  
Ever sad our long farewell!

\* \* \* \*

Dear to me thy noble blush;  
Dear thy comely, perfect form;  
Dear thine eye, blue-grey and clear;  
Dear thy wisdom and thy speech!

\* \* \* \*

---

<sup>1</sup> A youth of about eighteen, a man of rank, who would wait on an older man.



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Never have I met till now,  
Since I Oenfer Aifè<sup>1</sup> slew,  
One thy peer in deeds of arms,  
Never have I found, Ferdiad !”

At length, Laeg, his charioteer, persuaded Cuchulain to leave the spot, with these last words of lamentation :

“ Never trod in battle’s ring;  
Banba<sup>2</sup> nursed not on her breast;  
Never sprang from sea or land,  
King’s son that had larger fame !”

These repeated combats between Cuchulain and Medb’s followers delayed her host’s advance, and at last Medb grew weary : and also an incident before this waiting time must have shaken her confidence in her own safety :

Cuchulain made a threat in Methe that wherever he saw Medb, he would cast a stone at her, and that it would not go far from the side of her head. That he also fulfilled. In the place where he saw Medb, west of the ford, he cast a stone from his sling at her, so that it killed the pet bird that was on her shoulder. Medb passed over the ford eastwards, and again he cast a stone from his sling at the east of the ford, so that it killed the tame squirrel that was on her shoulder.

Eventually she broke her word and all the ancient Irish laws of soldierly honour, by marching straight on Conchabar’s capital, Emain Macha,<sup>3</sup> which she burned, as, on her way, she had pillaged and burned the province of Ulster. Here, too, she captured and led away the coveted prize, the Brown Bull. However, the three months of “ pains ” were done : Conchabar summoned the hosts of Ulster, and in a final battle the armies of Connacht were overthrown. With that strange taste for equalising results which runs through the *Táin*, even the honours of war were divided. Conchabar won the great battle, but Medb carried off the Brown Bull to Connacht. Nevertheless, at long last, the “ utter ruin,” predicted by Fedelm, fell on the arrogant Queen, for

<sup>1</sup> Cuchulain’s own son.

<sup>2</sup> An ancient name of Ireland.

<sup>3</sup> Pronounced Evvin Maha.



Ailill's white-horned Bull heard the "three bellowing calls" of "the Brown" as he approached Cruachan, and rushed out to meet him. The two fought. Cormac, looking on, said:

"No wonderful lasting treasure was this precious prize for us, that cannot defend himself against a stirk of his own age." The Brown Bull of Cualnge heard this—for he had human understanding—and he turned upon the White-horned—

and after a furious fight killed him, and carried the dead Bull's remains away on his horns, dropping them bit by bit, as he went across Ireland, home.

He turned his face northwards then, and went on thence to the summit of Sliab Breg, and he saw the peaks and knew the land of Cualnge, and a great agitation came over him at the sight of his own land and country, and he went his way towards it. In that place were women and youths and children lamenting the Brown Bull of Cualnge. They saw the Brown of Cualnge's forehead approaching them. "The forehead of a Bull cometh towards us!" they shouted. . . . Then he went . . . to Cuib, where he was wont to be with the yeld cow of Darè, and he tore up the earth there. . . . Then turned the Brown of Cualnge on the women and youths and children of the land of Cualnge, and with the greatness of his fury and rage he effected a great slaughter amongst them. He turned his back to the hill then and his heart broke in his breast, even as a nut breaks, and he belched out his heart like a black stone of dark blood. He went then and died between Ulster and Ui Echach<sup>1</sup> at Druim Tairb.

So Ailill's declaration long before—

"I swear by the god by whom my people swear the man that scoffs at Cuchulain here I will make two halves of"—

was justified; and Fedelm's prophecy—

"Brave Cuchulain, Sualtaim's son!  
All your host he'll smite in twain  
Till he works your utter ruin"—

came true.

In the ancient tale we find all those elements which have been interwoven, through twenty centuries, to make the Irish national Tragedy. Fate on her loom

<sup>1</sup> In County Down.

has spun for this little country a tapestry whose threads were fierceness, unconquerable valour, love of all beauty and especially of colour, a passion for daring adventure, energy, wistful dream-wonder, some unscrupulousness, and heart-wringing pathos; all burning itself away for a far-off goal, which always seemed to recede as the victors fancied they were nearing it.

At best, extracts can only give a faint idea of this great story, which has been called "the wildest and most fascinating saga-tale, not only of the entire Celtic world, but even of all Western Europe." Anyone who wishes to appreciate this description must read the whole tale.

*Beowulf* and the *Táin* are both racial epics. The only other one which can be dealt with in this book was written centuries later, after the tumult of the Civil War, after the Puritan rule, during the years which followed the Cavalier restoration of the Stuart line. It dealt not with a national, but with a world-wide theme, not with the present, but with a far-off past. It is not difficult to sympathise with Milton's choice of a subject when he wrote *Paradise Lost*. His life had been passed amidst strife and evil deeds not confined to one party or set of men. He definitely chose not a party, not a national, but a human matter, lifted away from earthly life on to the level of Eternity. Here English men and women may see, set forth sublimely, that ceaseless struggle between Good and Evil which, after all, underlay the story of *Beowulf* itself. Beneath the barbaric ways, the riotous feasting, the personal enmities which lie on the surface of our Early English Epic, there remained, however rough the way and dark the fate of men might seem, an undying care for and belief in the final victory of Right. With Milton, the war between Man helped by God, and the Powers of Evil fills the whole poem.

The human race, represented by Adam and Eve, is the "hero" of this great Epic. The archangels and all the rest of the Heavenly Powers are Man's allies; Satan,

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“Lucifer, son of the Morning”; the Rebel Archangel is Man’s foe. High above all, God reigns, Ruler and Judge of the tremendous conflict.

The story can be told briefly.

Satan in his pride conspired, in Heaven, with other Spirits to overthrow the throne of God, and was cast, with them, out of Heaven, to a bottomless place, there for ever to have his home:

Th’ infernal Serpent, he it was whose guile  
Stirr’d up with envy and revenge, deceiv’d  
The mother of mankind, what time his pride  
Had cast him out from Heav’n, with all his host  
Of rebel angels, by whose aid aspiring  
To set himself in glory above his peers,  
He trusted to have equall’d the most High,  
If he oppos’d; and with ambitious aims  
Against the throne and monarchy of God  
Rais’d impious war in Heav’n, and battle proud  
With vain attempt. Him the Almighty Power  
Hurl’d headlong flaming from th’ ethereal sky  
With hideous ruin and combustion down  
To bottomless perdition, there to dwell  
In adamant chains and penal fire,  
Who durst defy th’ Omnipotent to arms.  
Nine times the space that measures day and night  
To mortal men, he with his horrid crew  
Lay vanquisht, rolling in the fiery gulf,  
Confounded though immortal.

When these lost legions began to recover from the shock of their utter defeat, Satan attempted to rally them to a fresh fight. A vast palace rose, their future home, which served them, then and there, as a Council Hall. They discussed and rejected all suggestion of a fresh attack on Heaven, but Satan went forth alone to discover whether the rumour were true that God was about to create a fresh world, inhabited by new creatures “a little lower than the angels.” After a long and difficult journey he approached this new world. Milton described the beautiful spectacle which lay before the fallen Archangel, when having, so hardly, escaped from a terrible region of confusion he was

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at leisure to behold  
Far off th' empyreal Heav'n, extended wide  
In circuit, undetermin'd square or round,  
With opal towers and battlements adorn'd  
Of living sapphire, once his native seat;  
And fast by hanging in a golden chain  
This pendent world, in bigness as a star  
Of smallest magnitude close by the moon.

That is the gleaming, transparent sight of Heaven, with our Earth hanging from it, like a star in space, which met the troubled eyes of Satan, clouded still by the lurid splendour of his palace, Pandemonium, risen so strangely from the bottomless deep.

Milton developed his story by describing a scene in High Heaven. The Eternal Father, having seen Satan flying to this new world, told His Son that the lost Spirit would overcome the free wills of the newly created man and woman, and persuade them to the sin of disobedience. Whereupon, the Son offered Himself as a ransom for the ruined world, and was accepted by the Father, who decreed the Human Birth of our Lord, whereby he should unite in one Person God and Man by taking the Manhood into God.

Milton, after this interlude, returned to his story. Satan alighted on the outside rim of the world, and presently made his way to Eden, and found Adam and Eve. By eavesdropping, he learned that they were forbidden by God to eat of one particular tree, thus discovering a way of bringing them to ruin by decoying them into disobedience.

Milton added many details to the story as it is told in the Book Genesis, such, for example, as the measures taken for man's safety by the Archangels Uriel and Gabriel, including the actual forewarning of Adam by Gabriel. He also described a battle between the Angels, led by S. Michael, leader of the Heavenly Armies, and the rebel angels, which was only won when our Lord Himself had come to the Angels' help.

The seventh and eighth books add nothing to the progress of the story; they are filled with the Archangel

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Raphael's conversation with Adam about the Creation of the World, and the heavens in which it was placed, and Adam's story of finding Eve and marrying her.

Satan's plot, successfully worked out, filled the ninth book; the story of Eve's temptation, and of Adam's part in it, is familiar from Genesis. In the tenth book, Milton again added to the Bible story when in a wonderful picture, he described the resolution of Sin and Death, who had hitherto sat "within the gates of Hell," to leave it for the Earth, and to live there henceforth among the men, over whose parents Satan had just won so great a victory. On his way to Pandemonium to tell his hosts of this success, Satan met them.

As, on his arrival, he was addressing his followers, the curse which God had pronounced fell, and he and all his host were changed to serpents, and, fancying they saw before them the forbidden fruit of Eden, they seized it, only to bite upon the prophesied "dust."

In the remaining books of the poem, Milton set forth the misery of Adam and Eve after their sin, the repentance to which they eventually brought themselves, aided as they were all the time by the Archangel Michael; and their expulsion from Eden, which latter was rendered bearable to them by God's promise of the world's ransom by our Lord, of the establishment in the world of the Church of God, and of man's final restoration.

In his earliest youth Milton, on leaving Christ's College, had resolved to devote himself to a scholar's life. He had spent seven years at Cambridge; he retired for five more to his father's country house, a few miles from London, where he devoted himself to the Classics. His object he explained in these words, declaring that—

"an inward prompting . . . grew daily upon me, that by labour and intense study, joined with the strong propensity of Nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to aftertimes, as they should not willingly let die."

Milton had already written *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, and *Lycidas*, when the Civil War broke in. Eventually

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he laid aside his chosen work to serve the political needs of his country. When peace was restored he had paid the price of that service by losing his eyesight. Nevertheless he returned to the work he had chosen long years before. So *Paradise Lost* is not only one of the world's great poems, not only one of the indestructible glories of English Literature, but it remains to show how a man under crowding difficulties and heavy calamities can, if, as Beowulf said, "his courage holds," carry out a great purpose, planned when outward circumstances seemed more propitious.

It is not possible to show by extracts the real magnificence of *Paradise Lost*. But certain points can be brought out so. First, we can see Milton's supreme gift for using language to paint a picture as vivid to our imagination as a coloured canvas is to our eyes. It would be difficult to surpass his description of Pandemonium when it rose, out of dark nothingness, "like a mist":

Anon, out of the earth a fabric huge  
Rose like an exhalation, with the sound  
Of dulcet symphonies and voices sweet,  
Built like a temple, where pilasters round  
Were set, and Doric pillars overlaid  
With golden architrave; nor did there want  
Cornice or frieze, with bossy sculpture grav'n,  
The roof was fretted gold. Not Babylon  
Nor great Alcairo such magnificence  
Equall'd in all their glories, to enshrine  
Belus or Serapis their gods, or seat  
Their kings, when Egypt with Assyria strove  
In wealth and luxury. The ascending pile  
Stood fixt her stately highth, and straight the doors  
Op'ning their brazen folds discover wide  
Within, her ample spaces, o'er the smooth  
And level pavement: from the archèd roof  
Pendent by subtle magic, many a row  
Of starry lamps, and blazing cressets fed  
With naphtha and asphaltus yielded light  
As from a sky.

This is a typical instance of Milton's literary magnificence, issuing not only from his imagination, but from

his knowledge, borrowed from those who had seen them, of the opulent glories of the East, and his choice of rich and sounding words drawn from Greek and Latin. As a contrast, and as an example of his characteristically English and enduring love of beautiful country, we may take some lines descriptive of the Eden-bower of Adam and Eve, in that Eden where—

universal Pan  
Knit with the Graces and the Hours in dance  
Led on th' Eternal Spring,

which he here described in a passage which recalls a famous painting of Sandro Botticelli. There is, perhaps, no more delicate picture in *Paradise Lost* than this:

the roof  
Of thickest covert was inwoven shade,  
Laurel and myrtle, and what higher grew  
Of fine and fragrant leaf; on either side  
Acanthus, and each odorous bushy shrub  
Fenc'd up the verdant wall: each beauteous flow'r,  
Iris all hues, roses and jessamine  
Reared high their flourisht heads between and wrought  
Mosaic: under foot the violet,  
Crocus, and hyacinth with rich inlay  
Broider'd the ground, more coloured than with stone  
Of costliest emblem.<sup>1</sup>

His perfect description of nightfall must not be forgotten:

Now came still evening on, and twilight gray  
Had in her sober livery all things clad;  
Silence accompanied beast and bird,  
They to their grassy couch, these to their nests  
Were slunk, all but the wakeful nightingale;  
She all night long her amorous descant sung;  
Silence was pleas'd: now glowed the firmament,  
With living sapphires: Hesperus that led  
The starry host, rode brightest, till the moon  
Rising in clouded majesty at length  
Apparent queen, unveiled her peerless light,  
And o'er the dark her silver mantle threw.

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<sup>1</sup> *i.e.*, an inlaid floor, the meaning of the Latin word *emblema*.



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His love of natural beauty and of country life never deserted him. Even in one of his political pamphlets, when he was repelling an unjust attack on his personal character, he wrote that he was "up and stirring in winter often ere the sound of any bell awake men to labour or devotion; in summer as oft with the bird that first rouses, or not much tardier."

In *L'Allegro* he wrote this appeal:

Mirth, admit me of thy crew,

\* \* \* \*

To hear the lark begin his flight,  
And singing startle the dull night,  
From his watch tow'r in the skies,  
Till the dappled dawn doth rise;

\* \* \* \*

Sometime walking not unseen  
By hedgerow elms, on hillocks green,  
Right against the eastern gate,  
Where the great Sun begins his state,  
Rob'd in flames and amber light,  
The clouds in thousand liveries dight.  
While the plowman near at hand,  
Whistles o'er the furrow'd land,  
And the milkmaid singeth blithe  
And the mower whets his sithe,  
And every shepherd tells his tale  
Under the hawthorn in the dale.

Such was his attitude when he was a young man of about twenty-five; and such it was when, blind from hard work and almost sixty, he wrote his beautiful description of the First Garden of the World.

He could not only paint pictures of natural loveliness, but he could draw unforgettable portraits. Here is his description of Satan:

he above the rest

In shape and gesture proudly eminent  
Stood like a tow'r; his form had not yet lost  
All her original brightness, nor appear'd  
Less than archangel ruined.

\* \* \* \*

Dark'n'd so, yet shone  
Above them all th' Archangel, but his face



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Deep scars of thunder had intrencht, and care  
Sat on his faded cheek, but under brows  
Of dauntless courage, and considerate pride  
Waiting revenge.

From the Council of the Lost Angels, I will take two other portraits: first, Belial's—wily, cunning adviser whose outwardly beautiful appearance and fair speech were no true index to his character:

On the other side uprose  
Belial, in act more graceful and humane;  
A fairer person lost not Heav'n; he seem'd  
For dignity compos'd and high exploit;  
But all was false and hollow; though his tongue  
Dropt manna, and could make the worse appear  
The better reason, to perplex and dash  
Maturest counsels; for his thoughts were low;  
To vice industrious, but to noble deeds  
Timorous and slothful; yet he pleas'd the ear.

The other is the greatest portrait of the three, that of Satan's principal counsellor, Beelzebub. When we remember that England had just suffered all the turmoil of Civil War, which sundered men, whether good or bad, who might in peaceful times have been friends, and had brought them not only into conflict but into close observation of each other's motives and actions, we wonder whether, in drawing these characters, Milton may not have had some of the great English public men in his mind. Anyhow, Beelzebub is so real and vivid that it is difficult to believe that he was not, in some measure, drawn from life:

Beelzebub . . . than whom,  
Satan except, none higher sat, with grave  
Aspect he rose, and in his rising seem'd  
A pillar of state; deep on his front engraven  
Deliberation sat and public care;  
And princely counsel on his face yet shone,  
Majestic though in ruin: sage he stood  
With Atlantean shoulders fit to bear  
The weight of mightiest monarchies; his look  
Drew audience and attention still as night  
Or summer's noontide air.

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S. Raphael, "the sociable spirit," Milton draws from an outside point of view:

He stood  
Veil'd with his gorgeous wings, up springing light  
Flew through the midst of Heav'n. . . .  
From hence, no cloud, or, to obstruct his sight,  
Star interpos'd, however small he sees,

\* \* \* \* \*

Earth and the gard'n of God, with cedars crown'd  
Above all hills. . . .

Down thither prone in flight  
He speeds, and through the vast ethereal sky  
Sails between worlds and worlds. . . .

on th' eastern cliff of Paradise  
He lights, and to his proper shape returns  
A seraph wing'd; six wings he wore, to shade  
His lineaments divine; the pair that clad  
Each shoulder broad, came mantling o'er his breast,  
With regal ornament; the middle pair  
Girt like a starry zone his waist, and round  
Skirted his loins and thighs with downy gold  
And colours dipt in Heav'n; the third his feet  
Shadow'd from either heel with feathered mail,  
Sky-tinctured grain. Like Maia's<sup>1</sup> son he stood.

Milton's accounts of the lost Angels are more full of life and fire than any others: this picture of S. Raphael's personal beauty stands midway between their vigour and the tamer descriptions of Adam and Eve, with their rather "schoolmastery" atmosphere of Milton's view of the relations between men and women. Compared with the slight but so human picture in Genesis, these lines are cold and remote:

For contemplation he and valour form'd,  
For softness she and sweet attractive grace;  
He for God only, she for God in him:  
His fair large front and eye sublime declar'd  
Absolute rule; and hyacinthine locks  
Round from his parted forelock manly hung  
Clust'ring, but not beneath his shoulders broad:  
She as a veil down to the slender waist

---

<sup>1</sup> Maia, the mother of Mercury, messenger of the gods, was the most brilliant of the seven starry sisters in the constellation Pleiades.

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Her unadorned golden tresses wore  
Dis'hevelled, but in wanton ringlets wav'd  
As the vine curls her tendrils, which impli'd  
Subjection, but requir'd with gentle sway.

Neither the magnificence of the form of *Paradise Lost* nor the nobility of its meaning and purpose can be shown by quotations. In a few lines from the sixth book we can see, however, what Milton believed to be the very essence of that right conduct which God wills to have from all His creatures. S. Michael, returning to Heaven after his fight with the Rebel Angels, heard a "Voice" utter these words:

Servant of God, well done, well hast thou fought  
The better fight, who single hast maintain'd,  
Against revolted multitudes the cause  
Of truth, in words mightier than they in arms:  
And for the testimony of truth hast borne  
Universal reproach, far worse to bear  
Than violence: for this was all thy care  
To stand approv'd in sight of God, though worlds  
Judg'd thee perverse.

If we let ourselves look only at the surface of *Beowulf* and *Paradise Lost*, it is easy to see nothing but a difference so great that we fancy nothing could bridge it. But we have first to realise that *Beowulf* was written down at an early stage of our national life, probably, as a matter of fact, in the tenth century, the one among all those between the first and the twentieth which is usually believed to have cared least for learning and education. It may not have deserved Cardinal Baronius' description, "an age, iron, leaden, dark." In the East many scholars were busy; in Western Europe Odo of Cluni lived, and Gerbert and Fulbert of Chartres. England had S. Dunstan, her "first Minister of Education," who did his best to spread learning, even to the details of caring for the *accurate* copying of books; at Glastonbury he was helped by S. Ethelwold of Abingdon, of whom the remembrance lasts that it was "ever sweet to him to teach little children."

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But at the best it was a very different age from Milton's seventeenth century. Between the two, Europe had recovered and read the great literatures of Greece and Rome. After the partial fall of the Roman power in the sixth century, learning could only flourish in any part of Europe from which war, for a while, departed. Sometimes England, at others Ireland, or part of France, or some remote district of Germany or Spain would enjoy a little temporary peace and quiet. Then in monasteries, where Greek and Latin classics were more or less carefully kept, the monks and their scholar friends read them. By the beginning of the thirteenth century, after the fall of Constantinople in the twelfth, which had driven many Greek scholars West, a considerable measure of peace was restored in Europe, and a race of scholars grew up in Italy, Holland, England, France, Germany, who sought everywhere for Greek and Latin books—bought, borrowed, sometimes stole them—and copied and multiplied them. They not only read and loved them themselves, but brought up their children, quite young boys and girls, to love them too, not by way of learning a foreign language, but for sheer enjoyment of what was written in them.

Milton, living later still, naturally had a classical education; and so, as might be expected, the form of *Paradise Lost* is ornamented, polished, marked everywhere by learning, while *Beowulf* is the plain tale of some man to whom scholarship was not his first concern, but who delighted in a story of daring and adventurous life.

But if we go below the surface, a likeness between the two can be traced. In both we find interest in human character and in the happenings which arise out of human differences. We find courage, loyalty, a sense of honour, comradeship, an enduring, stark clinging to duty, however difficult; we find, too, the same scorn of material possessions when these compete with moral and spiritual claims.

Again, in all three of these epics the "supernatural"

plays a great part, as it does, in one form or another, in all European literature from Greek tragedy to to-day. By the supernatural playing a part is meant the belief that beyond this world which we can see and touch there is another region which we know by our spiritual insight, or by our conviction of right and wrong, by our appreciation of beauty, and through religious experience. The expression may be difficult, but not the thing itself. To our ancestors it meant magic weapons—Hrunting, Nægling, or Gae Bulga; the “screaming” of “eldritch beings” from the rims of shields and tips of spears; though even so we must never forget that in *Beowulf* the supernatural force of moral right is always present, however hard-pushed the fighter may be.

By Milton's time, after sixteen centuries of Christianity, the idea of the supernatural has expanded and risen; man's higher powers, according to him, are aided by angels, and sustained by a Personal God. But the essence of the idea remains, that beyond our natural world and powers there is other, greater, personal Power.

## CHAPTER III

### LYRICS, FROM EARLY DAYS TO THE COMMON-WEALTH

OF all poems the Lyric appeals to most people because, as Mr. Maurice Hewlett says, "it must come from the heart"; and, after all, everyone has a heart, while not everyone has a "head," in the sense of caring extremely for what is reasonable, thought-out, or learned.

In the story of most nations, therefore, a lyrical taste at least shows itself early. A long time may pass before a people produce finished, perfect lyrics; but a desire for song, and song about something which really interests the singer, whether a child or a grown-up person, seems to exist in most of us.

Few poems remain from Anglo-Saxon times: the greatest is the epic *Beowulf*. But there are some short ones—e.g., *The Wanderer*, which probably comes from eighth-century Northumbria. He was a wanderer by sea and land; he speaks of himself as one who—

through the watery-way for a long time must  
row with his hands over the rime-cold sea;

and then, in the very next lines as—

an earth-stepper, remembering hardships.

Northumbria looks out to the grey waters of the North Sea, and her inland moors and wastes are often rough-going still.

Other poems are *The Ruin*, of which much is lost; *The Wife's Complaint*; *The Husband's Message*; and *The Seafarer*, which last, though it is not a lyric, but a

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mixture of narrative and lamentation, yet has little lyrical passages which burst in when the cloud of trouble and fear lifts for a moment from the poet's mind.

These lines could be sung to music; if to a melancholy melody, not without some discords:

There I nothing heard but the howling of the sea,  
The ice-cold wave, and 'whiles, the wild-swan's song.  
Screaming of the gannet sufficed me for joy  
And the swoughing of the seal instead of men's mirth:  
Instead of mead-drinking, the sea-mew's singing.  
Storms beat the stone cliffs, and the sea-swallow,  
Icy-feathered, answered; and the ocean-eagle,  
With storm-wet wings, continually screamed.

When the Seafarer's mood changed, he sang, as if to the lyre, of beauty and joy:

Trees rebloom with flowers, boroughs grow fair,  
Beautiful the fields become, as the world revives;  
All things then remind the man of lively mood,  
Should he in his mind so think to journey  
Over the flood-way, far off to wander.

He could not, however, keep his heart cheerful for long. The prospect might seem fair, but he had been mistaken so often that his song soon fell down to a note of boding fear:

Every cuckoo calls a warning, with his word of sorrow;  
Summer's watchman singeth, sorrow bides his time,  
Bitter is the breast's hoard.

By the end of the thirteenth century Englishmen had learned to write lyrics, rather before indeed, for this *Cuckoo Song*, which belongs to the second quarter, is one of the most joyous, freshest lyrics in our speech. It loses something, of course, when turned into a modern dress, but it is still full of the spring, of the world's young freshness:

*Sing, cuckoo ! now ! Sing, cuckoo !  
Sing, cuckoo ! Sing, cuckoo, now !*

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Summer is a-coming in;  
Loudly sing, cuckoo!  
Grows the seed, and blows the mead,  
And the wood springs now.  
Sing, cuckoo!  
Ewe bleateth after lamb,  
After calf lows the cow,  
Bullock frisketh, stag boundeth,  
Merrily sing, Cuckoo!  
Cuckoo! Cuckoo!  
Well singest thou, cuckoo!  
Cease not, never, now.

Many mediæval lyrics have come down to us; men already saw that any object of human desire or interest would serve as subject matter. Of course, there are love-songs. This is the closing verse of one written before Chaucer was born, probably about 1310. The lover has already declared "I wax mad, a maiden destroys me"; and then he describes her:

Lily-white is she  
Her tint like rose on spray!  
Who snatches my peace away.  
Woman prudent and wise,  
Of splendour she wins the prize.  
Maid one of the best.  
This Woman dwells in the West.

It has a curious abruptness about it, and the poet had not learned that it ruins a lyric to transpose words, to put them out of their obvious order.

Not all young men were so lovelorn as this youth. Here is the merry song of one who greatly preferred his freedom; an outspoken man of the late fifteenth century:

*A, a, a, o*  
*Yet I love wheresoever I go.*

In all the world is no merrier life  
Than a young man's without a wife:  
For he can live without any strife  
In every place where he may go.

In every place he is loved above all  
Among the maidens great and small,  
In dancing, in piping, in running at ball,  
In every place where he may go.



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They set light store by married men,  
When at the ball they run, also;  
They cast their love to young men  
In every place wheresoever he go.

Then maidens say: "Farewell, Jack!  
Thy love is stuffed all in thy pack;  
Thou bearest thy love behind thy back,"  
In every place wheresoever he go.

The lyrics of these centuries are varied in their subjects; here is one which shows the Englishman's characteristic love of his pet animals; few, if any, races love their animals more whole-heartedly than we:

I have a gentle cock  
Crows me the coming of day;  
Early he doth rouse me  
My Mattin-prayers to say.

I have a gentle cock,  
The best bred I could get:  
His comb of coral red,  
His tail it is of jet.

I have a gentle cock  
Born of parents two;  
His comb of coral red  
And his tail of indigo.

His legs are pearly grey,  
So elegant and small,  
His spurs of silvery white,  
Up to the quick and all.

Of crystal are his eyes,  
Set right into amber:  
And every night he percheth him  
Within my lady's chamber.

Nearly a hundred years earlier one of those humorous lyrics, which are just as natural as those of love or of natural scenery and the rest, had been written, possibly by Chaucer. Those unfortunate people who imagine that all poetry is solemn and dry can correct themselves by this. Yet it is not made of that pure fun coming out of a

heart free from care and as light as a feather, nor of that mixed fun with a sharp edge on it which is called wit; but of surface fun which covers without hiding a vein of seriousness and concern. Chaucer was not, or did not think he was, as well off as he desired to be; so he expressed these facts in his *Complaint to his Purse*, which I have put into modernly spelt English:

To you my purse and to no other wight,  
Complain I, for you be my lady dear;  
I am so sorry now, that you be light  
That for certain, if you make me heavy cheer  
I would as lief be laid upon my bier,  
For which unto your mercy thus I cry:

“Be heavy again—or else must I die.”

Now vouchsafe this day, ere it be night,  
That I of you the blissful sound may hear,  
Or see your colour like the sun, bright,  
That of yellowness never had a peer.  
You are my life, you are my heart's steer,<sup>1</sup>  
Queen of comfort and of good company.

“Be heavy again—or else must I die.”

Now purse, that art to me my life's light,  
And saviour, that is, down in this world here,  
Out of this trouble help me by your might.  
Since that you will not be my treasurer,  
For I am shaved as close as any friar,  
But I pray unto your courtesy

“Be heavy again—or else must I die.”

If Chaucer wrote this, he did so probably at the end of his life, when he was badly off. If so, the King to whom he sent it was Henry IV, not Richard II, as some say.

The wide range of English Song cannot be appreciated unless we know something of the religious and devotional lyrics. This Christmas slumber-song, coming down to us from the age of the York and Lancaster wars, may serve as a very charming instance:

“Lullay, my Child, and weep no more;  
Sleep, and now be still:  
The King of bliss Thy Father is,  
As it was His will.”

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<sup>1</sup> *i.e.*, rudder.

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This other night, I saw a sight—  
A Maid a cradle keep—  
And ever she sang and said among:  
“Lullay, my Child, and sleep.”

“I may not sleep, but I may weep,  
I am so woe-begone;  
Sleep I would, but I am cold,  
And clothes have I none.”

Methought I heard the Child answered,  
And to His Mother He said:  
“My Mother dear, what do I here,  
In Crib why am I laid ?

I was born and laid before  
Beasts both ox and ass:  
My Mother mild, I am thy Child,  
But He My Father was.

Adam's guilt man had spilt,<sup>1</sup>  
That sin grieveth Me sore.  
Man, for thee, here shall I be  
Thirty winters and more.

Dole 'tis to see, here shall I be  
Hanged upon the Rood:  
With scourges beat, My wounds all wet,  
And give My flesh for thy good.

Here shall I be, hanged on a Tree,  
And die as it is skill;<sup>2</sup>  
That I have bought, lose I will not,  
It is My Father's Will.

A spear so sharp shall pierce My Heart,  
For deeds that I have done:  
Father of Grace, is it Thou hast  
Forgotten Thy little Son ?

Without any pity, here shall I pay,  
And make My flesh all sore,  
Adam I wis, this death it is  
For thee, and for many more.”

It is not possible to include many of these “Middle English” songs, charming and interesting as they are

<sup>1</sup> Ruined.

<sup>2</sup> Reasonable.

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But this one, beautiful in its joy and freshness, its religious genuineness and simplicity, its love of animals and of the country, and not least attractive in its playful fun, gathers up into itself the leading characteristics of Englishmen, as they lived and felt and enjoyed themselves, in that reign of Henry VII, which some of us were inclined to connect with money-making dulness out of our national wool. That notion and this poem are as far as the poles asunder:

*Can I not sing but "Hoy!"*  
*When the jolly shepherd made so much joy.*

The shepherd upon a hill he sat,  
He had upon him his tabard and hat,  
His tarbox, his pipe and his flagat:<sup>1</sup>  
His name was called Jolly, Jolly Wat,  
For he was a good herds-boy  
Ut hoy!  
For in his pipe he made so much joy.

The shepherd upon a hill was laid  
His dog to his girdle was tied,  
He had only slept a little brayd<sup>2</sup>  
When *Gloria in Excelsis* to him was said.  
Ut hoy!  
For in his pipe he made so much joy.

The shepherd upon a hill he stood,  
Round about him his sheep all stood,  
He put his hand under his hood,  
He saw a star as red as blood.  
Ut hoy!  
For in his pipe he made so much joy.

Now farewell, Mall,<sup>3</sup> and also Will,<sup>3</sup>  
For my love go ye all still,  
Unto<sup>4</sup> I come again you till<sup>5</sup>  
And evermore ring well thy bell, Will.  
Ut hoy!  
For in his pipe he made so much joy!

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<sup>1</sup> Flagon, or flask.

<sup>2</sup> Time, while.

<sup>3</sup> Names of his sheep.

<sup>4</sup> Until.

<sup>5</sup> To.

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Now must I go where Christ was born;  
Farewell, I come again to-morrow morn.  
Dog, keep well my sheep from the corn,  
And warn me loud when I blow my horn.

Ut hoy!

For in his pipe he made so much joy.

When Wat to Bethlehem coming was,  
He sweated, he had gone so quick a pace;  
He found Jesus in a simple place,  
Between an ox and an ass.

Ut hoy!

For in his pipe he made so much joy.

The shepherd anon said right,  
"I will go see yon wondrous sight,  
Whereas the Angel sings in the height,  
And the star that shines so bright."

Ut hoy!

For in his pipe he made so much joy.

Jesus, I offer Thee here my pipe,  
My shirt, my tarbox and my scrip.  
Home to my fellows now will I skip,  
And also look unto my sheep.

Ut hoy!

For in his pipe he made so much joy.

"Now farewell, mine own herdsman Wat!"

"Yes, 'fore God, Lady, so am I hat.<sup>1</sup>

Lull Jesus well in thy lap,

And farewell Joseph with Thy round cap.

Ut hoy!"

For in his pipe he made so much joy.

Now may I well both hop and sing,  
For I have been at Christ's bearing,  
Home to my fellows now will I fling.  
Christ of Heaven, to His bliss us bring!

Ut hoy!

For in his pipe he made so much joy.

All these poems are English right through. After them a difference creeps in. In the reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII England began to play her part in

<sup>1</sup> Called.

Europe; she was on the way to become a great Western power, and so was brought more and more into contact with the rest. Specially was she influenced in the sixteenth century by Italy and France. Not only Henry VIII and Francis I met on the Field of the Cloth of Gold, but Englishmen began to mix with men of other nations in the Paradise fields of Poetry. Though love of England and of the homeland never dies, perhaps we never again find a lyric carolling of high things quite so debonairly as this shepherd, who though he talked of Bethlehem was native of the English Downs.

As we pass on to the reigns of Elizabeth and James I, the lyrics are so abundant and so beautiful that no more than a scantiest gleanings can be packed into this book. A few love-songs, which surely cannot be surpassed by any others, shall come first.

John Lyly may be unread nowadays, so far as his prose goes, but his sparkling little song, *Cards and Kisses*—half jest, half earnest—is not yet forgotten:

Cupid and my Campaspe play'd  
At cards for kisses—Cupid paid!  
He stakes his quiver, bow and arrows,  
His mother's doves, and team of sparrows;  
Loses them too: then down he throws  
The coral of his lips, the rose  
Growing on 's cheek (but none knows how);  
With these, the crystal of his brow,  
And then the dimple of his chin:  
All these did my Campaspe win.  
At last, he set her both his eyes—  
She won, and Cupid blind did rise.  
O Love! has she done this for thee?  
What shall, alas, become of me?

Since Elizabeth's reign was one of great activity, of fresh enterprises in all sorts of directions, it is natural that our literature should, as it did, show to what heights it could rise.

One of the earliest Elizabethan dramatists, who died so young, left behind him this love-lyric, simple and yet very hard to rival:

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Come live with me and be my Love,  
And we will all the pleasures prove  
That hills and valleys, dales and fields,  
Or woods or steepy mountain yields.

And we will sit upon the rocks,  
And see the shepherds feed their flocks,  
By shallow rivers to whose falls  
Melodious birds sing madrigals.

And I will make thee beds of roses  
And a thousand fragrant posies;  
A cap of flowers and a kirtle  
Embroider'd all with leaves of myrtle.

A gown made of the finest wool  
Which from our pretty lambs we pull;  
Fair lined slippers from the cold,  
With buckles of the purest gold.

A belt of straw and ivy-buds  
With coral clasps and amber studs:  
And if these pleasures may thee move,  
Come live with me and be my Love!

The shepherd swains shall dance and sing,  
For thy delight each May-morning:  
If these delights thy mind may move  
Then live with me and be my Love.

The Passionate Shepherd was not the only lover whom Marlowe knew. In his tragedy, *Dr. Faustus*, a scholar who had sold his soul for knowledge, there is to be found one of the finest lyrical passages of love in English. By magic means, a vision had been brought before Faustus of that Helen of Troy, wife of Menelaus, King of Sparta, who was the most beautiful woman of her time. Having been persuaded by Paris, son of the King of Troy, to desert Menelaus for him, she became the cause of the Trojan War.

As this vision of her appeared in the German scholar's study, he burst out, in Marlowe's play, into this song of wonder and admiration:

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Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships,  
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium ?  
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.  
Her lips suck forth my soul, see where it flies !—  
Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again.  
Here will I dwell, for Heaven is in these lips,  
And all is dross that is not Helena.  
I will be Paris, and for love of thee,  
Instead of Troy, shall Wertenberg be sacked:  
And I will combat with weak Menelaus,  
And wear thy colours on my plumèd crest:  
Yea, I will wound Achilles in the heel,  
And then return to Helen for a kiss.  
Oh ! thou art fairer than the evening air  
Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars.<sup>1</sup>

Then we turn to Shakespeare, and he brings us down from these giddy heights to the clean open country, for his plays are strewn with little jewels of song: *When that I was and a little tiny boy; Where the bee sucks; Lawn as white as driven snow; Faery King, attend and mark;* and all the rest. Who can say which of them all is the best ? At any rate this is among the best:

When daffodils begin to peer,  
With heigh, the doxy over the dale,  
Why, then comes in the sweet o' the year;  
For the red blood reigns in the winter's pale.

The white sheet bleaching on the hedge,  
With heigh, the sweet birds, O, how they sing !  
Doth set my pugging tooth on edge;  
For a quart of ale is a dish for a king.

The lark, that tirra-lyra chants,  
With heigh, with heigh, the thrush, and the jay,  
Are summer songs for me and my aunts,  
While we lie tumbling in the hay.

So sang that "snapper-up of unconsidered trifles," Autolycus, as he surely only irrelevantly remembered his aunts because he was hard pressed for a rime.

The most lyrical stanza from *The Passionate Pilgrim*, full as it is of Shakespeare's bitter-sweet wisdom, must not be forgotten:

<sup>1</sup> The quotation is from Marlowe's plays, in the Mermaid Series.



Crabbèd age and youth cannot live together;  
 Youth is full of pleasance, age is full of care;  
 Youth like summer morn, age like winter weather,  
 Youth like summer brave, age like winter bare.  
 Youth is full of sport, age's breath is short;  
 Youth is nimble, age is lame;  
 Youth is hot and bold, age is weak and cold;  
 Youth is wild and age is tame.  
 Age, I do abhor thee; youth, I do adore thee;  
 O, my love, my love is young!  
 Age, I do defy thee: O sweet shepherd, hie thee  
 For methinks thou stayst too long.

Then Ben Jonson was not only a playwright, but a  
 lyrist too. Rarely has the goddess of the chase been  
 more worthily sung than in his song, *To Diana* :

Queen and Huntress, chaste and fair  
 Now the sun is laid to sleep,  
 Seated in thy silver chair,  
 State in wonted manner keep:  
 Hesperus entreats thy light,  
 Goddess excellently bright.

Earth, let not thy envious shade  
 Dare itself to interpose;  
 Cynthia's shining orb was made  
 Heaven to clear when day did close:  
 Bless us then with wishèd sight,  
 Goddess excellently bright.

Lay thy bow of pearl apart  
 And thy crystal-shining quiver;  
 Give unto the flying hart  
 Space to breathe, how short soever:  
 Thou that mak'st a day of night,  
 Goddess excellently bright.

Love did not always run smoothly, however, even in  
 the great Elizabethan days. This seems to have been the  
 case with the nameless man who, somewhere about the  
 year 1580, left behind him this song for his disdainful lady :

Alas, my love, you do me wrong,  
 To cast me off discourteously;  
 And I have lovèd you so long,  
 Delighting in your company.

## LYRICS, EARLY DAYS TO COMMONWEALTH

For oh, Greensleeves was all my joy !  
And oh, Greensleeves was my delight !  
And oh, Greensleeves was my heart of gold !  
And who but my lady Greensleeves ?

I bought thee petticoats of the best,  
The cloth as fine as might be ;  
I gave thee jewels for thy chest  
And all this cost I spent on thee,  
For oh, Greensleeves. . . .

Thy smock of silk, both fair and white,  
With gold embroider'd gorgeously,  
Thy petticoat of sendal<sup>1</sup> right :  
And these I bought thee gladly,  
For oh, Greensleeves. . . .

Greensleeves, now farewell ! adieu !  
God I pray to prosper thee !  
For I am still thy lover true.  
Come once again and love me !  
For oh, Greensleeves. . . .

Save this anonymous poet, all the rest of the Elizabethans quoted so far were above all else dramatists. But there was one who was "the Poet's Poet," who wrote no drama, Edmund Spenser, the greatest of all non-dramatic Elizabethans. With the exception of the *Epithalamion*, Spenser's great marriage hymn, his first poem, *The Shepheardes Calendar*, which was published in 1579, is his most lyrical long poem. Some of its twelve Eclogues have a moral or political meaning beneath the poetry; but others are lyrical in subject, if one may say so, as well as in form. Colin Clout is the recognised leader of the shepherds, but he is hopelessly crossed in love, and has thrown down his pipe in despair. In the fourth Eclogue, Hobbinoll, "his dear friend," sings Colin's lay in praise of Queen Elizabeth, whose portrait Spenser draws thus :

See where she sits upon the grassie greene,  
(O seemely sight)  
Yclad in Scarlot like a mayden Queene,  
And Ermines white.

---

<sup>1</sup> A very rich silk, woven in the Middle Ages. It is sometimes spelt cendal.

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Upon her head a Cremosin<sup>1</sup> Coronet  
 With Damaske roses and Daffadillies set:  
     Bayleaves betweene  
     And Primroses greene,  
 Embellish the sweete Violet.

Though someone may tiresomely point out that Damask roses and daffodils do not bloom at the same time, he cannot deny the beauty of these lines. The sixth Eclogue opens with Colin's bitter lamentations over his faithless lady-love. But in high June, Hobbinoll cannot listen patiently to woe: he counsels Colin to let her go her way and himself be merry in the midsummer joy:

TO *Colin*, here the place, whose pleasant syte  
 From other shades hath weaned my wandering mynde:  
 Tell me, what wants me here to work delyte?  
 The simple aire, the gentle warbling wynde,  
 So calm, so cool, as nowhere else I fynde:  
 The grassie ground with daintye Daysies dight,  
 The Bramble Bush, where Byrds of every kinde  
 To the waters fall their tunes attemper right.

\* \* \* \* \*

Then if by me thou list advised be  
 Forsake the soyle that so doth thee bewitch:  
 Leave me those hilles, where harbrough nis to see,<sup>2</sup>  
 Nor holybush, nor brere, nor winding witche;<sup>3</sup>  
 And to the dales resort, where shepheards ritch,  
 And fruitfull flocks bene every where to see,  
 Here no night Ravens lodge more black than pitche,  
 Nor elvish ghosts, nor gastly owles doe flee.

But frendly Faeries, met with many Graces,  
 And light-fote Nymphs can chase the lingring night,  
 With Heydegues,<sup>4</sup> and trimly trodden traces,  
 Whilst systers nyne which dwell on *Parnasse* hight,  
 Do make them Musick for their more delight.  
 And *Pan* himself, to kisse their christall faces,  
 Will pype and daunce, where *Phæbe* shineth bright:  
 Such pierlesse pleasures have we in these places.

\* \* \* \* \*

<sup>1</sup> Crimson.

<sup>3</sup> Wych-elm.

<sup>2</sup> Where shelter is not to be seen.

<sup>4</sup> Country-dances.

## LYRICS, EARLY DAYS TO COMMONWEALTH

*Colin*, to hear thy rymes and roundelayes,  
Which thou wert wont on wastfull hilles to sing,  
I more delight, than larke in Sommer dayes;  
Whose Echo made the neighbour groves to ring,  
And taught the byrds, which in the lower spring  
Did shroud in shady leaves from sunny rayes,  
Frame to thy song their cheerful cheriping,  
Or hold theyr peace, for shame of thy sweet layes.

I saw *Calliops* with Muses moe  
Soone as thy Oaten pype began to sound,  
Their yvorie Luites and Tamburins forgoe.  
And from the fountaine, where they sat arounde  
Run after hastily thy silver sound.  
But when they came, where thou thy skill didst showe,  
They drew aback, as halfe with shame confound,  
Shepheard to see, them in their art outgoe.

The October Eclogue has three beautiful stanzas—  
Spenser's tribute to the essence and greatness of Poetry.  
Cuddie, the "pattern poet," has lamented the world's  
inattention, which has, incidentally, brought him to  
poverty:

They han the pleasure, I a slender prise.  
I beate the bush, the birds to them do flye;—

and complains that the lovelorn Colin is sitting silent:

He were he not with love so ill bedight  
Would mount as high and sing as sweet as Swan.

Then Piers, his friend, bursts out into the praise of  
love, which is the Poet's inspiration:

Ah son, for love does teach him climb so hie,  
And lifts him up out of the loathsome mire;  
Such immortal mirror, as he doth admire  
Would raise his mind above the starrie skie,  
And cause a caitiff courage to aspire,  
For lofty love doth loath a lowly eye.

Though the *Faerie Queene* is a narrative poem, it  
has lyrical stanzas—for instance, the first one of  
Canto IV of Book VI, describing the wounded knight

Calepine's condition, he, who, when he was cured of those wounds—

cast abroad to wend  
To take the air and hear the thrushes songe.

The only verses which can be quoted here are two from the last canto of Book I. Perhaps sound and sense have never been more exquisitely wedded, even by Spenser, than in these, where he describes the Palace after the marriage of Una and the Red Cross Knight:

Then 'gan they sprinckle all the posts with wine,  
And made great feast to solemnise that day;  
They all perfumde with frankencense divine,  
And precious odours fetcht from far away,  
That all the house did sweat with great aray:  
And all the while sweete Musick did apply  
Her curious skill, the warbling notes to play,  
To drive away the dull Melancholy;  
The whiles one sung a song of love and jollity.

During the which there was an heavenly noise  
Heard sound through all the Pallace pleasantly,  
Like as it had been many an Angels voice,  
Sing, before th' eternall majesty,  
In their trinall triplicities on hye;  
Yet wist no creature, whence that heavenly sweet  
Proceeded, yet each one felt secretly  
Himself thereby reft of his sences meet,  
And ravished with rare impression in his sprite.

The high-water mark of Spenser's lyrical genius is his marriage song, the *Epithalamion*; upon his own wedding-day he poured out this flood of joy, melody and ecstasy:

So Orpheus did for his owne bride,  
So I unto myself alone will sing,  
The woods shall to me answer and my Echo ring.

\* \* \* \* \*

Bringe with you all the Nymphes that you can heare  
Both of the rivers and the forrests greene;  
And of the sea that neighbours to her neare,  
Al with gay girlands goodly wel beseene,  
And let them also with them bring in hand,  
Another gay girland  
For my fayre love of lillyes and of roses,  
Bound truelove wize with a blew silk riband.

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And let them make great store of bridale poses,  
And let them eeke bring store of other flowers  
To deck the bridale bowers.  
And let the ground whereas her foot shall tread,  
For feare the stones her tender foot should wrong,  
Be strewed with fragrant flowers all along,  
And diapred lyke the discolored mead.  
Which done, doe at her chamber door awayt,  
For she will waken strayt,  
The whiles doe ye this song unto her sing,  
The woods shall to you answer and your Echo ring.

\* \* \* \* \*

Wake now, my love awake; for it is time,  
The Rosy Morne long since left Tithones bed,  
All ready to her silver coach to clime,  
And Phœbus 'gins to shew his glorious hed.  
Hark how the cheerefull birds do chaunt theyr aies,  
And caroll of loves praise.  
The merry Larke her mattins sings aloft,  
The thrush replyes, the Mavis descant playes,  
The Ouzell shrills, the Ruddock<sup>1</sup> warbles soft,  
So goodly all agree with sweet consent,  
To this dayes merriment,  
Ah my deere love why doe ye sleepe thus long,  
When meeter were that you should now awake,  
T' awayt the coming of your joyous make,<sup>2</sup>  
And hearken to the birds lovelearned song,  
The dewy leaves among.  
For they of joy and pleasaunce to you sing,  
That all the woods them answer and their echo ring.

At the end of Spenser's *Amoretti*, his Love-Sonnets, which seem to be closing in gloom, and immediately before the *Epithalamion*, his triumph-song of love, he puts this most delightful little poem, which, if less musical than his marriage hymn, has a very charming spice of humour:

Upon a day as Love lay sweetly slumbering,  
all in his mothers lap,  
A gentle Bee with his loud trumpet murm'ring,  
about him flew by hap.

---

<sup>1</sup> Robin redbreast.

<sup>2</sup> Mate

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Whereof when he was wakened with the noyse,  
and saw the beast so small:  
Whats this (quoth he) that gives so great a voyce,  
that wakens men withall?  
In angry wize he flies about,  
and threatens all with corage stout.  
To whom his mother closely smiling sayd,  
twixt earnest and twixt game:  
See, thou thyselfe likewise art lyttle made,  
if thou regard the same.  
And yet thou suffrest neyther gods in sky,  
nor men in earth to rest:  
And when thou art disposed cruelly,  
theyr sleep thou dost molest,  
Then eyther change thy cruelty,  
or give like leave unto the fly.  
Nathelesse the cruell boy not so content,  
would needs the fly pursue,  
And in his hand with heedless hardiment,  
him caught for to subdue.  
But when on it he hasty hand did lay,  
the Bee him stung therefore;  
Now out alas (he cryde) and welaway,  
I wounded am full sore;  
The fly that I so much did scorne,  
hath hurt me with his little horne.  
Unto his mother straight he weeping came,  
and of his grief complayned:  
Who could not choose but laugh at his fond game,  
though sad to see him pained.  
Think now (quod she) my sonne, how great the smart,  
of those whom thou dost wound:  
Full many thou hast prickèd to the hart,  
that pitty never found;  
Therefore henceforth some pitty take,  
when thou dost spoil of lovers make.  
She took him streight full pitiously lamenting,  
and wrapt him in her smock;  
She wrapt him softly, all the while repenting,  
that he the fly did mock.  
She drest his wound and it embaulmed wel  
with salve of soveraine might;  
And then she bath'd him in a dainty well,  
the well of deare delight.  
Who would not oft be stung as this,  
to be so bath'd in Venus bliss?

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The wanton boy was shortly wel recured,  
of that his malady;  
But he soone after fresh again enured  
his former cruelty.  
And since that time he wounded hath myselfe  
with his sharp darte of love,  
And now forgets the cruel careless elfe  
his mother's hest to prove.  
So now I languish till he please  
my pining anguish to appease.

The men of Elizabethan days were not men of one or a few ideas: this England was alive with thought and action which the lyrics reflect. An instance may be found in the grave and beautiful poem which the playwright George Peele addressed to Queen Elizabeth. He had been at the University; he had written tales as well as plays; but here he speaks of himself as a soldier and courtier:

His golden locks time hath to silver turn'd;  
O time too swift, O swiftness never ceasing!  
His youth 'gainst time and age hath ever spurn'd,  
But spurn'd in vain; youth waneth by increasing:  
Beauty, strength, youth are flowers but fading seen;  
Duty, faith, love are roots, and ever green.

His helmet now shall make a hive for bees;  
And, lovers' sonnets turn'd to holy psalms,  
A man-at-arms must now serve on his knees,  
And feed on prayers, which are Age his alms:  
But though from court to cottage he depart,  
His Saint is sure of his unspotted heart.

And when he saddest sits in homely cell,  
He'll teach his swains this carol for a song,—  
"Blest be the hearts that wish my sovereign well,  
Curst be the souls that think her any wrong."  
Goddess, allow this aged man his right  
To be your beadsman now that was your knight.

If, after the lapse of centuries, we no longer regard Queen Elizabeth either as a Goddess or a Saint, we may still have imagination enough to understand why her



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courtiers could so write. If it were an age of exaggeration, at any rate the fine poem *Integer Vitæ*—sometimes allotted to Francis Bacon, but probably with more justice to Thomas Campion—shows the strong, sober moral sense which grew up amidst the variety and brilliant adventures of Elizabethan life. It is the consolatory song of a man whose life is whole, unstained:

The man of life upright  
Whose guiltless heart is free  
From all dishonest deeds,  
Or thought of vanity;

The man whose silent days  
In harmless joys are spent,  
Whom hopes cannot delude,  
Nor sorrow discontent;

That man needs neither towers  
Nor armour for defence,  
Nor secret vaults to fly  
From thunder's violence:

He only can behold  
With unaffrighted eyes  
The horrors of the deep  
And terror of the skies.

Thus scorning all the cares  
That fate or fortune brings,  
He makes the heaven his book,  
His wisdom heavenly things;

Good thoughts his only friends,  
His wealth a well-spent age,  
The earth his sober inn  
And quiet pilgrimage.

On a more spiritual note, Robert Southwell—the Jesuit priest, imprisoned, often racked, and finally, in 1595, executed by Queen Elizabeth's orders—wrote this lyric, *The Burning Babe*, a poem on our Lord's birth, so beautiful that "rare Ben Jonson" declared that he would

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have destroyed many of his own poems had he, could he have, written this one:

As I in hoary winter's night  
Stood shivering in the snow,  
Surprised was I with sudden heat  
Which made my heart to glow;  
And lifting up a fearful eye  
To view what fire was near,  
A pretty Babe, all burning bright  
Did in the air appear;  
Who, scorched with excessive heat,  
Such floods of tears did shed  
As though His floods should quench His flames,  
Which with His tears were fed.  
"Alas!" quoth He, "but newly born  
In fiery hearts I fry,  
Yet none approach to warm their hearts  
Or feel My fire but I!

"My faultless Breast the furnace is;  
The fuel wounding thorns;  
Love is the fire, and sighs the smoke;  
The ashes, shames and scorns;  
The fuel Justice layeth on,  
And Mercy blows the coals,  
The metal in this furnace wrought  
Are men's defiled souls:  
For which as now on fire I am  
To work them to their good,  
So will I melt into a bath  
To wash them in My blood."  
With this, He vanish'd out of sight  
And swiftly shrunk away,  
And swift I callèd unto mind  
That it was Christmas Day.

In 1652, there appeared in "S. Victor's Street at the Golden Sun," in Paris, from the press of Peter Tarza, printer to the Archbishop of Paris, a collection of Sacred Poems, by an English exile, Richard Crashaw. He was driven out of his Fellowship, at Peterhouse, Cambridge, because he would not subscribe to the Puritans' Covenant. There is, in this slender volume, a Nativity Hymn of Shepherds, of whom, in its course, two sing this verse together:

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We saw Thee in Thy balmy nest,  
Young Dawn of our Eternal Day!  
We saw Thine eyes break from their East,  
And chase the trembling shades away.  
We saw Thee and we blest the sight,  
We saw Thee by Thine own sweet light.

Then one shepherd, aghast at this world's reception of  
the Holy Babe, sings alone:

Poor world (said I) what wilt thou do,  
To entertain this starry Stranger?  
Is this the best thou canst bestow?  
A cold, and not too cleanly, manger?  
Contend the powers of Heaven and Earth,  
To fit a bed for this huge birth?

Then the full chorus of shepherds bursts into lyrical  
praise of the Divine Child:

Welcome, all wonders in one sight!  
Eternity shut in a span!  
Summer in Winter, Day in Night!  
Heaven in Earth, and God in man!  
Great Little One! whose all-embracing birth  
Lifts Earth to Heaven, stoops Heaven to Earth.

Thus the Nativity Songs of the late sixteenth and early  
seventeenth centuries show us that no religious strife,  
fierce punishment, nor hardship, nor any other injury,  
can crush out a man's faith, if he "holds on," as Beowulf,  
long ages before, would have him do.

The beginning of the English seventeenth century saw  
the making of the imperishable Translation of the Old  
and New Testaments which we still call the "Authorised  
Version" of the Bible, in English. Prose is its style,  
though of the many books which make it up, many,  
specially in the Old Testament, were in the Original  
poetical. Though we may call it all prose, there are  
many lyrical passages which have all the quality of true  
song. Of course, as all translations do, such passages  
owe their beauty of meaning to the originals; but in this  
case, English lyrical prose—gorgeous, stately, pathetic  
or whatever else it may have been in Elizabethan days—

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rose to a splendour and a music which, it is safe to say, nothing else in the English tongue can surpass. Perhaps this quality of melody is never more perfect than when some touch, at least, of natural beauty so dear to the English heart, enters. Magnificent passages might be taken from Job, Isaiah, the Psalms, or the Book of Wisdom. Perhaps the two following are less widely known, but they are not less lovely. In the first, from Ecclesiasticus, Wisdom is speaking:

I came out of the mouth of the most High, and covered the earth as a cloud.

I dwelt in high places, and my throne is in a cloudy pillar.

I alone compassed the circuit of heaven, and walked in the bottom of the deep.

In the waves of the sea, and in all the earth, and in every people and nation, I got a possession. . . .

And I took root in an honourable people, even in the portion of the Lord's inheritance.

I was exalted like a cedar in Libanus, and as a cypress-tree upon the mountains of Hermon.

I was exalted like a palm tree in Engaddi, and as a rose plant in Jericho, as a fair olive tree in a pleasant field, and grew up as a plane tree by the water.

I gave a sweet smell like cinnamon and aspalathus, and I yielded a pleasant odour like the best myrrh, as galbanum, and onyx, and sweet storax, and as the fume of frankincense in the tabernacle.

Fragrance of spices, the coolness of running water, the colour of fair blooms is all there, and through it sounds a solemn music as Wisdom declares—

I am the mother of fair love, and fear and knowledge and holy hope.

The other passage is from the Song of Songs:

A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.

Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits, camphire with spikenard.

Spikenard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes with all the chief spices.

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A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon.

Awake, O north wind, and come, thou south: blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my Beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits.

Marvellous melody in a fragrant world.

The seventeenth century in England began with the dulness of James I, and moved slowly onward to the disaster of the Civil War. Out of it all there grew up a literature of unique beauty. The uncertainty of life's conditions which prevailed throughout the century's course can be felt in the varying temper of the lyrics. There are, of course, as always, those of human love: but there are many on the graver, perplexing problems of life, on death, and some dealing with that conviction of intimate, personal communion with God which is called mystical love. Men, some at least, were led by their sorrows and losses, by the injustice they suffered, to a spirituality which carried them through and out of their wretchedness to a level where nothing any more disturbed their inner peace, however stripped they might be of everyday comfort and ordinary prosperity. To this we owe many exquisite lyrics. After all, neither fine poetry nor any other great achievement is the outcome of fat content.

Sir Henry Wotton, descended from an old family distinguished for their culture and their services to England, had a chequered life. While a young man he was committed to prison by Queen Mary, on his own uncle's request, merely because the uncle had dreamed that he would use liberty to get into mischief. When he was released he travelled, for nine years, as secretary to Elizabeth's favourite, Robert, Earl of Essex. Later on he was, under James I, ambassador to Venice and Germany. Finally he was made Provost of Eton College. Such a man knew much of men and of life. These stanzas from *The Character of a Happy Life* tell us his conclusions—those of an English "Public Servant":

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How happy is he born and taught  
That serveth not another's will;  
Whose armour is his honest thought,  
And simple truth his utmost skill!

Whose passions not his master are;  
Whose soul is still<sup>1</sup> prepared for death,  
Untied unto the world by care  
Of public fame or private breath;

\* \* \* \* \*

Who hath his life from rumours freed;  
Whose conscience is his strong retreat,  
Whose state can neither flatteries feed,  
Nor ruin make oppressors great;

\* \* \* \* \*

This man is freed from servile bands  
Of hope to rise or fear to fall:  
Lord of himself, though not of lands,  
And hoping nothing yet hath all.

Henry King, Bishop of Chichester, was, though his religious views tended towards Puritanism, a devoted adherent of Charles I. When the Puritans drove him out of his bishopric, he retired from public life. He poured out some of his sorrow and distress in these particularly musical lines:

Like to the falling of a star,  
Or as the flight of eagles are,  
Or like the fresh spring's gaudy hue,  
Or silver drops of morning dew,  
Or like the wind that chafes the flood,  
Or bubbles which on water stood;  
Ev'n such is man, whose borrowed light  
Is straight call'd in and paid to-night.  
The wind blows out; the bubble dies;  
The spring entomb'd in autumn lies;  
The dew dries up, the star is shot,  
The flight is past—and man forgot.

One of the bitterest of very early seventeenth-century lyrics is Sir Walter Raleigh's *The Lie*. Probably, he wrote it in the Tower, while he was still smarting under

<sup>1</sup> Ever.

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the provocations of his unjust trial and imprisonment. It is too long for complete quotation here, but a few verses will show how essentially worthless public life could seem to a great man, even in the afterglow of what is called the glory of Elizabethan days. If it be a one-sided view, yet it is a view; and we may well consider all sides:

Go, Soul, the body's guest,  
Upon a thankless arrant:  
Fear not to touch the best;  
The truth shall be thy warrant:  
Go, since I needs must die,  
And give the world the lie.

Say to the Court, it glows  
And shines like rotten wood;  
Say to the Church, it shows  
What's good, and doth no good:  
If Church and Court reply  
Then give them both the lie.

\* \* \* \*

Tell men of high condition,  
That manage the estate,  
Their purpose is ambition,  
Their practice only hate;  
And if they once reply,  
Then give them all the lie.

\* \* \* \*

Tell wit how much it wrangles  
In tickle points of niceness;  
Tell wisdom she entangles  
Herself in over-wiseness:  
And when they do reply,  
Straight give them both the lie.

Tell physic of her boldness;  
Tell skill it is pretension;  
Tell charity of coldness;  
Tell law it is contention:  
And as they do reply  
So give them still the lie.

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Tell fortune of her blindness;  
Tell nature of decay;  
Tell friendship of unkindness;  
Tell justice of delay:  
And if they will reply,  
Then give them all the lie.

\* \* \* \*

So when thou hast, as I  
Commanded thee, done blabbing,—  
Although to give the lie  
Deserves no less than stabbing,—  
Stab at thee he that will,  
No stab the soul can kill.

That nothing could “kill” Raleigh’s soul is certain. He lay in prison, after an iniquitous trial from 1603 to 1618, in which latter year he was executed. His poem, *Sir Walter Raleigh’s Pilgrimage*, said by some to have been written “the night before he was beheaded,” shows us how he met death:

Blood must be my body’s balmer;  
No other balm will there be given;  
Whilst my soul, like quiet palmer,  
Travelleth toward the land of heaven;  
Over the silver mountains,  
Where spring the nectar fountains;  
There will I kiss  
The bowl of bliss;  
And drink mine everlasting fill  
Upon every milken hill.

“A very gallant gentleman.”

With Raleigh’s bitter poem, *The Lie*, we may compare James Shirley’s fine lyric, said to have been the favourite one of Charles I:

The glories of our blood and state  
Are shadows, not substantial things;  
There is no armour against Fate,  
Death lays his icy hand on Kings;  
Sceptre and crown  
Must tumble down,  
And in the dust be equal made  
With the poor crooked scythe and spade.



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Some men with swords may reap the field,  
And plant fresh laurels where they kill:  
But their strong nerves at last must yield;  
They tame but one another still:  
Early or late  
They stoop to Fate,  
And must give up their murmuring breath  
When they, pale captives, creep to death.

The garlands wither on your brow;  
Then boast no more your mighty deeds;  
Upon Death's purple altar now  
See where the victor-victim bleeds.  
Your heads must come  
To the cold tomb:  
Only the actions of the just  
Smell sweet and blossom in the dust.

Raleigh, in his concluding line, rather defies ill-doers than comforts himself; but Shirley, in this last couplet, really redresses the balance, and restores inner peace. Raleigh's grey mood had, through continued injustice, become ingrained. A passage from *The History of the World*, written in his prison, a piece of majestic prose which nearly becomes lyrical, shows how sincere was his gloom:

O Eloquent, Just and Mighty Death! whom none could advise, thou hast persuaded; what none hath dared, thou hast done; and whom all the World hath flattered, thou only hast cast out of the world and despised; thou hast drawn together all the far-stretched Greatness, all the Pride, Cruelty and Ambition of Man, and covered it all over with these two narrow words, *hic jacet*.<sup>1</sup>

When we put these poems into the midst of the parliamentary measures and confusing battle-fields and struggling parties which make up the tale of the bare historical facts of the seventeenth century, then human beings with their real thoughts and feelings enter; and what perhaps once seemed dry lives. Yet it is a relief to turn to some of the other lyrics of that time, because however much fighting and injustice there was, men and

<sup>1</sup> Here he lies.

## LYRICS, EARLY DAYS TO COMMONWEALTH

women still fell in love, and still cared for each other through all disasters. A wonderful poem remains, which some critics believe to be Raleigh's, and others give to an unknown author with the initials A. W.—a poem which tells of that love which “many waters cannot quench.” These are the two most perfect stanzas:

No mortal thing can bear so high a price,  
But that with mortal thing it may be bought;  
The corn of Sicil buys the western spice,  
French wine of us, of them our cloth is sought.  
No pearls, no gold, no stones, no corn, no spice,  
No cloth, no wine, of Love can pay the price.

What thing is Love, which nought can countervail?  
Nought save itself, ev'n such a thing is Love.  
All worldly wealth in worth as far doth fail,  
As lowest earth doth yield to heaven above,  
Divine is Love, and scorneth worldly pelf,  
And can be bought with nothing but with self.

Though it is not easy to choose among the beautiful songs written by Carew, Charles I's Cup-bearer, or Server-in-Ordinary, every English man or woman who has any care for poetry must care to know this one:

Ask me no more where Jove bestows  
When June is past, the dying rose;  
For in your beauty's, orient deep,  
These flowers, as in their causes, sleep.

Ask me no more, whither do stray  
The golden atoms of the day;  
For, in pure love, Heaven did prepare  
Those powders to enrich your hair.

Ask me no more whither doth haste  
The nightingale, when May is past;  
For in your sweet, dividing throat  
She winters and keeps warm her note.

Ask me no more where those stars light  
That downwards fall in dead of night;  
For in your eyes they sit, and there  
Fixèd become as in their sphere.

## ENGLISH LITERATURE

Ask me no more, if east or west  
The Phoenix builds her spicy nest;  
For unto you at last she flies,  
And in your fragrant bosom dies.

That is a song made of love and imagination, of light, colour and music. The poems of Richard Lovelace are marked with the troubles of the Civil War: everyone knows the one to Lucasta which, when she reproached him for leaving her service for the king's, reminded her that:

I could not love thee, Dear, so much,  
Loved I not honour more—

a couplet in which truth and music are so closely bound up that it cannot die while England and the English exist. Probably the last verse of *To Althea*, written while he was in prison, is equally well known:

Stone walls do not a prison make,  
Nor iron bars a cage;  
Minds, innocent and quiet, take  
That for an hermitage;  
If I have freedom in my love,  
And in my soul am free,  
Angels alone, that soar above,  
Enjoy such liberty.

The lyrics of Charles I's reign are said by some to be the most beautiful we possess; at any rate they have a rare vein of unworldliness in them. Yet it was James I's reign which had heard the voice of absolutely limitless devotion, when Herrick sang his song *To Anthea, who may command him anything*:

Bid me to live, and I will live  
Thy Protestant to be:  
Or bid me love, and I will give  
A loving heart to thee.

A heart as soft, a heart as kind,  
A heart as sound and free,  
As in the whole world thou canst find,  
That heart I'll give to thee.

## LYRICS, EARLY DAYS TO COMMONWEALTH

Bid that heart stay, and it will stay,  
To honour thy Decree:  
Or bid it languish quite away  
And't shall do so for thee.

Bid me to weep, and I will weep,  
While I have eyes to see:  
And having none yet I will keep  
A heart to weep for thee.

Bid me despair and I'll despair  
Under that cypress tree:  
Or bid me die, and I will dare  
E'en Death, to die for thee.

Thou art my life, my love, my heart,  
The very eyes of me:  
And hast command of every part  
To live and die for thee.

One more love-song from these years must suffice:  
one whose author is unknown, but whose individual  
longing "makes a universal appeal," as every true lyric  
must:

Love not me for comely grace,  
For my pleasing eye or face,  
Nor for any outward part,  
No, nor for a constant heart:  
For these may fail or turn to ill,  
So thou and I shall sever:  
Keep, therefore, a true woman's eye,  
And love me still, but know not why—  
So hast thou the same reason still  
To doat upon me ever!

There is a still higher love than that of men and women for each other, even at that love's highest and best—the love of the human soul for God. Richard Crashaw has perhaps come as near imprisoning this in words as any poet can. He was writing of the great Spanish Saint—good, charming, witty, wise Teresa. Suddenly casting from him the business of writing about her portrait, he, all ablaze with love and wonder, cried to her spirit which had left this world:

## ENGLISH LITERATURE

O thou undaunted daughter of desires !  
By all thy dower of lights and fires;  
By all the eagle in thee, all the dove;  
By all thy lives and deaths of love;  
By thy large draughts of intellectual day,  
And by thy thirsts of love more large than they;  
By all thy brim-fill'd bowls of sweet desire,  
By thy last morning's draught of liquid fire;  
By the full kingdom of that final kiss  
That seiz'd thy parting soul and seal'd thee His;  
By all the Heaven thou hast in Him  
(Fair sister of the Seraphim !),  
By all of Him we have in thee;  
Leave nothing of myself in me.  
Let me so read thy life, that I  
Unto all life of mine may die.

The seventeenth century was, in England, an age of struggle, confusion and flat contradictions. Something of its many-sidedness can be seen, I hope, in this handful of lyrics from its rich harvest-field. After the misery, peace, in some measure, returned, for a time at least. We will take leave of the age on a note of quiet joy, which two poets furnish; the one writing of this present world's peace, the other of Heaven's.

Andrew Marvell was, by all his sympathies, a " king's man "; but after Charles's death he seems to have decided that Cromwell possessed powers of serving England; so he contentedly accepted the post of tutor to the little daughter of the Parliamentarian General Fairfax; doubtless the more readily as Fairfax had not consented to the king's execution. In the security and beauty of Fairfax's country home in Yorkshire, Marvell wrote a series of poems upon country life which, if they are now less widely known than they deserve, must last as long as the English tongue. This stanza from his " Garden " is so perfect in sound, so lovely as a picture, so satisfying to high emotion, that it can well stand alone:

Here at the fountain's sliding foot,  
Or at some fruit-tree's mossy root,  
Casting the body's vest aside,  
My soul into the boughs does glide;

## LYRICS, EARLY DAYS TO COMMONWEALTH

There, like a bird, it sits and sings,  
Then whets and combs its silver wings,  
And, till prepared for longer flight,  
Waves in its plumes the various light.

Vaughan, more unfortunate in outward circumstances than Marvell, and of an utterly different temperament, hungered, genuine as his love of natural beauty was, for some greater security than is found among men:

My Soul, there is a countrie  
Afar beyond the stars;  
Where stands a wingèd sentrie  
All skilfull in the wars.  
There above noise and danger  
Sweet peace sits crown'd with smiles,  
And One born in a manger  
Commands the beauteous files.  
He is thy gracious friend  
And (O my Soul awake !)  
Did in pure love descend  
To die here for thy sake.  
If thou canst get but thither,  
There growes the flow're of peace,  
The rose that cannot wither,  
Thy fortresse and thy ease.  
Leave then thy foolish ranges;  
For none can thee secure,  
But One, Who never changes,  
Thy God, thy Life, thy Cure.

Not very much is known about Vaughan's private life; but this much is true: he tried two professions and succeeded in neither. In the Civil War he lost his best friends, and what possessions he had of his own. The cause he supported, King Charles's, was lost. The Church he loved was sorely injured, and he himself was left without its spiritual help. But he learned slowly that to the man "whose courage holds" such things, however bitter, do not finally matter; and he won through to the inner peace which endures when lesser comfort passes.

## CHAPTER IV

### LATER LYRICS

THE years lying between the Restoration of Charles II and the end of the eighteenth century were not, on the whole, likely to produce many lyrics, nor did they do it. The minds of men were turned to matters of government, to questions of wealth, and of what we call public life. They cared more for philosophy than art, more for prose than for poetry. Therefore, and because in the nineteenth century we find such an abundance of songs that it is impossible here to give more than the scantiest idea of them, by the most careful choice among them, we may leave the eighteenth century out, save for one love-song, a poem by the Ayrshire poet, Robert Burns, which can challenge the claims of anyone in these islands, written before or since:

O my Luve's like a red, red rose  
That's newly sprung in June:  
O my Luve's like the melodie  
That's sweetly played in tune.  
So fair art thou, my bonnie lass,  
So deep in luve am I:  
And I will luve thee still, my dear,  
Till a' the seas gang dry !  
  
Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,  
And the rocks melt in the sun,  
I will luve thee still, my dear,  
While the sands o' life shall run.  
And fare thee weel, my only Luve,  
And fare thee weel, awhile !  
And I will come again, my Luve,  
Tho' it were ten thousand mile.

We may, suitably, continue with a few love-lyrics, picked out of a countless number made during the nine-

teenth century. Perhaps another's choice would reject these for quite different songs; for though there are rules of poetry, there are also promptings of individual taste. Few people agree wholly, specially about lyrics. But at least, I think, I may claim for all included here, that no one of them is unworthy of our Literature's great traditions, and that, taken all together, they show its many-sidedness. Blake's *Song* is the earliest in time. Who or what Love's victim is precisely, he leaves us to imagine; always in his poetry there is, as here, mystery, wrapping his pictures in a shining haze:

How sweet I roam'd from field to field  
And tasted all the summer's pride,  
Till I the prince of love beheld  
Who in the sunny beams did glide!

He shewed me lilies for my hair,  
And blushing roses for my brow;  
He led me through his gardens fair  
Where all his golden pleasures grow.

With sweet May dew's my wings were wet,  
And Phœbus fir'd my vocal rage;  
He caught me in his silken net,  
And shut me in his golden cage.

He loves to sit and hear me sing,  
Then laughing, sports and plays with me;  
Then stretches out my golden wing  
And mocks my loss of liberty.

When we turn to Tennyson's love-songs, we almost must choose *Maud*. The whole poem is long, but these the best stanzas, those of the Invocation and of the coming response to it, throb with passion. They show, too, his wonderful gift for making words sound like the meaning they bear:

Come into the garden, Maud,  
For the black bat, night, has flown,  
Come into the garden, Maud,  
I am here at the gate, alone;  
And the woodbine spices are wafted abroad,  
And the musk of the rose is blown.



For a breeze of morning moves,  
And the planet of Love is on high,  
Beginning to faint in the light that she loves,  
On a bed of daffodil sky,  
To faint in the light of the sun she loves,  
To faint in his light and to die.

\* \* \* \*

There has fallen a splendid tear  
From the passion-flower at the gate.  
She is coming, my dove, my dear;  
She is coming, my life, my fate;  
The red rose cries, "She is near, she is near;"  
And the white rose weeps, "She is late;"  
The larkspur listens, "I hear, I hear,"  
And the lily whispers, "I wait."

She is coming, my own, my sweet;  
Were it ever so airy a tread,  
My heart would hear her and beat,  
Were it earth in an earthy bed;  
My dust would hear her and beat,  
Had I lain for a century dead;  
Would start and tremble under her feet,  
And blossom in purple and red.

Robert Browning was not seldom accused of being very rough in his verse, and very difficult to understand. Yet anyone who will take a little trouble can find in his work some of the most musical lines written while he lived and wrote; moreover, these addressed to his wife, after her death, do not seem particularly hard to understand:

A ring without a posy, and that ring mine ?

O lyric Love, half angel and half bird  
And all a wonder and a wild desire,—  
Boldest of hearts that ever braved the sun,  
Took sanctuary within the holier blue,  
And sang a kindred soul out to his face—  
Yet human at the red-ripe of the heart—  
When the first summons from the darkling earth  
Reached thee amid thy chambers, blanched their blue,  
And bared them of the glory,—to drop down,  
To toil for man, to suffer or to die—  
This is the same voice: can thy soul know change ?  
Hail then, and hearken from the realms of help !

## LATER LYRICS

Beside these love-lyrics of Tennyson and Browning so passionate as they are, it is interesting to put one which comes from Ireland—sad, distressed country, set in the Atlantic, covered so often with mists and drifting rain. It is a land of half lights, of wandering gloom, of subdued shades, of whispering winds, and calling voices. All that is of the texture of this lyric of Seumas O'Sullivan: and instead of violence of passion we find the love which has passed beyond tumult into some land of irrevocable peace:

Tremulous grey of dusk  
Deepening into the blue,  
It is the path that leads  
Ever to you.

Child of the dusk, your eyes  
Quietly light my way:  
Quiet as evening stars,  
Quiet and grey.

All the magic of dusk,  
Tremulous grey and blue,  
Gathers into my heart,  
Quiet for you.

But love goes on and on; it cannot die. That truth is the underlying thought of a poem written quite recently. The poet, Elroy Flecker, had spent much of his life in dreary political work in the East, had lived there longing for England. Then he became hopelessly ill, and at the moment when his friends were going to the Great War, to save, as they believed, everything which makes life of value, he lay dying in the hill-country of Switzerland. These young men did not fight to rescue the kind of riches which is represented by money, but to secure the wisdom of all time, its literature, its thought, its art. Flecker, instead of joining them, could only lie helpless, waiting for death. Endowed with great natural gifts, he had always been a deliberate and careful craftsman; to the very end of his strength he worked, capturing his dreams, polishing his verse.

This lyric of love, in and beyond death, was included in the last sheaf of poems which he could prepare—in the first two lines he refers to this constant polishing—which, under the title of *The Old Ships*, was published after his death in 1915. The poem is called *Stillness* :

When the words rustle no more,  
And the last work's done,  
When the bolt lies deep in the door,  
And Fire, our Sun,  
Falls on the dark-laned meadows of the floor;

When from the clock's last chime to the next chime  
Silence beats his drum,  
And Space with gaunt grey eyes and her brother Time  
Wheeling and whispering come,  
She with the mould of form and he with the loom of rhyme:

Then twittering out in the night my thought-birds flee,  
I am emptied of all my dreams:  
I only hear Earth turning, I only see  
Ether's long bankless streams,  
And only know I should drown if you  
Laid not your hand on me.

But we must turn away from these love-lyrics, back to the beginning of the nineteenth century when the "Romantics" toiled to scatter the eighteenth century's cold greyness, and to light up the world again with sunshine, colour and sweet sound. Amidst many poets, six stand out pre-eminently. As Blake's poem was the first of the love-songs quoted here, so his unique verses shall come at the head of those lyrics of the first quarter of the century for which we can find space. With its pictures, colour and mysterious insight, and not less mysterious sense of awe, it has charmed generations of children, old and young:

Tyger ! Tyger ! burning bright  
In the forests of the night,  
What immortal hand or eye  
Could frame thy fearful symmetry ?

## LATER LYRICS

In what distant deeps or skies  
Burnt the fire of thine eyes ?  
On what wings dare he aspire ?  
What the hand dare seize the fire

And what shoulder, and what art,  
Could twist the sinews of thy heart ?  
And when thy heart began to beat,  
What dread hand ? and what dread feet ?

What the hammer ? what the chain ?  
In what furnace was thy brain ?  
What the anvil ? what dread grasp  
Dare its deadly terrors clasp ?

When the stars threw down their spears,  
And water'd heaven with their tears,  
Did he smile his work to see ?  
Did he who made the Lamb make thee ?

Tyger ! Tyger ! burning bright  
In the forests of the night,  
What immortal hand or eye,  
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry ?

In the Literature of every nation there is probably a tiny band who are unlike all the rest. That is certainly true of some English poets, and Blake is one of these. His individuality is so marked that he stands apart. Long study is needed before anyone can really appreciate this fully. Some suggestion of it may be understood, perhaps, by a comparison of two of his poems. Among his *Poetical Sketches* is a little song, *To Spring*. It sings not only of Spring, but of Blake's love for his own England's kind of the coming of Spring

O thou with dewy locks, who lookest down  
Thro' the clear windows of the morning, turn  
Thine angel eyes upon our western isle,  
Which in full choir hails thy approach, O Spring !

The hills tell each other, and the list'ning  
Vallies hear; all our longing eyes are turned  
Up to thy bright pavilions: issue forth,  
And let thy holy feet visit our clime.

## ENGLISH LITERATURE

Come o'er the eastern hills, and let our winds  
Kiss thy perfumèd garments; let us taste  
Thy morn and evening breath; scatter thy pearls  
Upon our love-sick land that mourns for thee.

O deck her forth with thy fair fingers; pour  
Thy soft kisses on her bosom; and put  
Thy golden crown upon her languish'd head,  
Whose modest tresses were bound up for thee!

In these verses we have the expression of human joy in the natural beauty of this physical world, and with it an atmosphere of the love of our own homeland: the loveliness is of natural, not of human, things. There are other verses of Blake's, in which he is again thinking of England, of her dearness to him, and of her natural beauty. But he has gone below the surface; he has thought of her not only as his homeland, but as that of other men and women much less endowed with joy than himself; he has thought, too, of something else, of that devastated blackened misery that men, in their desire for riches, have substituted over square miles on square miles for England's pristine condition, before the countryside was turned into sites for factories, not always with due regard to real rights or the just dues of working-people. The verses which follow come from his *Milton*:

And did those feet in ancient time  
Walk upon England's mountains green?  
And was the holy Lamb of God  
On England's pleasant pastures seen?

And did the Countenance Divine  
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?  
And was Jerusalem builded here  
Among these dark Satanic Mills?

Bring me my Bow of burning gold!  
Bring me my Arrows of desire!  
Bring me my Spear! O clouds, unfold!  
Bring me my Chariot of fire!

I will not cease from Mental Fight  
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand,  
Till we have built Jerusalem  
In England's green and pleasant Land.

Here the poet has become a prophet; not in that sense of the word which means seeing beforehand, but in that of seeing into, seeing what lies beneath, exchanging what seems to be for what really is.

Keats, who while very young was attacked by mortal illness, died at the age of twenty-six, in Italy, whither he had gone in the hope of being cured. He and Shelley were the most brilliantly gifted of the poets of the nineteenth-century Revival. It is impossible to know what heights and depths of achievement he might have reached had he lived to mature his genius. It is not very easy to believe that he would have surpassed his *Nightingale*. Though he included it among his Odes, it seems really to belong to lyrical poetry, and so may find its place in this chapter:

I.

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains  
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,  
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains,  
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:  
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,  
But being too happy in thy happiness,—  
That thou, light-wingèd Dryad of the trees,  
In some melodious plot  
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,  
Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

\* \* \* \* \*

V.

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,  
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,  
But, in embalmèd darkness, guess each sweet  
Wherewith the seasonable month endows  
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;  
White hawthorn and the pastoral eglantine;  
Fast-fading violets cover'd up in leaves;  
And mid-May's eldest child  
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,  
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eve;

VI.

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time  
 I have been half in love with easeful Death,  
 Called him soft names in many a mused rhyme,  
 To take into the air my quiet breath;  
 Now more than ever seems it rich to die,  
 To cease upon the midnight with no pain,  
 While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad  
     In such an ecstasy!  
 Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—  
 To thy high requiem become a sod.

VII.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!  
 No hungry generations tread thee down;  
 The voice I hear this passing night was heard  
 In ancient days by emperor and clown;  
 Perhaps the selfsame song hath found a path  
 Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,  
 She stood in tears amid the alien corn;  
     The same that oft-times hath  
 Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam  
 Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Some thirty-five years later, another young Englishman, far too much neglected now, Sydney Dobell, wrote a long poem, in which there occurs one lyrical passage which may compare with Keats' nightingale song. Dobell's lines have not the vast imaginative sweep, the full rich music, nor the wistful desire of Keats; but they have understanding, true vision, the deft touch of the lover of the home country; and, further, the slender yet unbroken resonance of the last lines is a thing standing alone, not found in any other English lines in quite that way:

Among the thickest hazels of the brake  
 Perchance some nightingale doth shake  
 His feathers, and the air is full of song;  
 In those old days when I was young and strong,  
 He used to sing on yonder garden tree  
 Beside the nursery.

## LATER LYRICS

Ah ! I remember how I loved to wake  
And find him singing on the selfsame bough,  
    (I know it even now)  
Where, since the flit of bat,  
In ceaseless voice he sat,  
Trying the spring night over, like a tune,  
Beneath the vernal moon;  
And while I listed long,  
Day rose, and still he sang,  
And all his staunchless song,  
As something falling unaware,  
Fell out of the tall trees he sang among,  
Fell ringing down the ringing morn, and rang—  
Rang like a golden jewel down a golden stair.

Shelley, whose life was almost as brief and whose death was even more tragic than Keats', was the supreme lyricist of the first quarter of the nineteenth century; unfortunate in his most troubled and short life, he literally sang his way to death. A large part of his work consists purely of lyrical verse; and the spirit of song penetrated into all that he wrote—plays, narratives, all. The following lines, from *Prometheus Unbound*, the drama in which he dreamed of the restoration of human liberty, might describe Shelley himself. A Spirit speaks:

On a poet's lips I slept  
Dreaming like a love-adept  
In the sound his breathing kept;  
Nor seeks nor finds he mortal blisses,  
But feeds on the aërial kisses  
Of shapes that haunt thought's wildernesses.  
He will watch from dawn to gloom  
The lake-reflected sun illumine  
The yellow-bees in the ivy-bloom,  
Nor heed, nor see, what things they be;  
But from these create he can  
Forms more real than living man,  
Nurslings of immortality !

Later in the play, Spirits and the Hours sing choruses, songs so skiey, so shimmering with colour, and quivering with unearthly sound, that they stand alone, unmatched in our poetry:



## ENGLISH LITERATURE

### *Chorus of Hours.*

Whence come ye, so wild and so fleet,  
For sandals of lightning are on your feet,  
And your wings are soft and swift as thought  
And your eyes are as love which is veiled not ?

### *Chorus of Spirits.*

We come from the mind  
Of human kind,  
Which was late so dusk, and obscene and blind,  
Now 'tis an ocean  
Of clear emotion,  
A heaven of serene and mighty motion.

From that deep abyss  
Of wonder and bliss  
Whose caverns are crystal palaces;  
From those skiey towers  
Where Thought's crowned powers  
Sit watching your dance, ye happy hours !

\* \* \* \* \*

From the temples high  
Of Man's ear and eye,  
Roofed over Sculpture and Poesy;  
From the murmurings  
Of the unsealed springs  
Where Science bedews his Dædal<sup>1</sup> wings.

\* \* \* \* \*

Our feet now, every palm,  
Are sandalled with calm,  
And the dew of our wings is a rain of balm;  
And beyond our eyes,  
The human love lies,  
Which makes all it gazes on Paradise.

\* \* \* \* \*

### *Chorus of Hours.*

Break the dance, and scatter the song,  
Let some depart, and some remain,  
Wherever we fly we lead along  
In leashes, like star-beams, soft yet strong,  
The clouds that are heavy with love's sweet rain.

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<sup>1</sup> Dædalus, an Athenian, was the greatest inventor, artist and artificer of his time.

No lyric of Shelley's can ever be broken up without suffering grievous loss: and further, among the many, it is very hard to choose, whether it shall be *The Skylark*, in the maddest riot of Spring's flushing strength, or *The Cloud*, or the *Hymn of Apollo*, or the *Hymn of Pan*, or what. Perhaps of all the stanzas of *The Cloud*, with its charm of double rimes, this is the loveliest:

That orbèd maiden with white fire laden,  
 Whom mortals call the moon,  
 Glides glimmering o'er my fleece-like floor,  
 By the midnight breezes strewn;  
 And wherever the beat of her unseen feet,  
 Which only the angels hear,  
 May have broken the woof of my tent's thin roof,  
 The stars peep behind her and peer;  
 And I laugh to see them whirl and flee,  
 Like a swarm of golden bees,  
 When I widen the rent in my wind-built tent,  
 Till the calm rivers, lakes and seas,  
 Like strips of the sky fallen through me on high,  
 Are each paved with the moon and these.

Who can say to what delicate instrument such lines could be sung?—perhaps only to Pan's pipes; those elusive, wistful pipes by which, in one little French city Bourges, a goatherd, night and morning, still leads his flock to and from their pasture. Technically, the lines which close *Prometheus Unbound* are not a lyric: but they are lyrical. They chant the poet's dream of humanity redeemed from its vilest passions, its miserable desires, its irrevocable injustices:

Love, from its awful throne of patient power  
 In the wise heart, from the last giddy hour  
 Of dead endurance, from the slippery, steep  
 And narrow verge of crag-like agony, springs  
 And folds over the world its healing wings.

Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom and Endurance,  
 These are the seals of that most firm assurance  
 Which bars the pit over Destruction's strength  
 And if, with infirm hand, Eternity,  
 Mother of many acts and hours, should free  
 The serpent that would clasp her with his length;

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These are the spells by which to reassume  
An empire o'er the disentangled doom.

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;  
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;  
To defy Power, which seems omnipotent;  
To love and bear; to hope till Hope creates  
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;  
Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;  
This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be  
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;  
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire and Victory.

Compared with the choric songs of *Prometheus*, or the swaying melody of *The Cloud*, this is solemn music—organ-toned. The following lines, perhaps some of the most beautiful Shelley ever wrote, he might have dreamed to the violin he loved well:

### I.

Swiftly walk o'er the western wave,  
    Spirit of Night!  
Out of the misty, eastern cave,  
Where all the long and lone daylight,  
Thou wovest dreams of joy and fear,  
Which make thee terrible and dear—  
    Swift be thy flight!

### II.

Wrap thy form in a mantle gray,  
    Star-inwrought!  
Blind with thine hair the eyes of Day;  
    Kiss her until she be wearied out,  
Then wander o'er city, and sea and land,  
Touching all with thine opiate wand,  
    Come, long sought!

### III.

When I arose and saw the dawn  
    I sighed for thee;  
When light rode high, and the dew was gone,  
And noon lay heavy on flower and tree,  
And the weary Day turned to his rest,  
Lingering like an unloved guest,  
    I sighed for thee.

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### IV.

Thy brother Death came, and cried,  
    Wouldest thou me ?  
Thy sweet child Sleep, the filmy-eyed,  
Murmured like a noon-tide bee,  
Shall I nestle by thy side ?  
Wouldest thou me ?—And I replied,  
    No, not thee !

### V.

Death will come when thou art dead,  
    Soon, too soon—  
Sleep will come when thou art fled ;  
Of neither would I ask the boon  
I ask of thee, beloved Night—  
Swift be thine approaching flight,  
    Come soon, soon !

It was not often that Shelley lived in so quiet an hour as that. Generally, to turn from him to Wordsworth is like passing away from flashing dawns, blazing noons and mysterious darkness, and coming unawares in the grey afternoon to russet downs where the sheep are folded, and the air is sweet with the mingled richness of the small flowers which grow in the springy turf.

Even though it is true, as it has often been said, that Wordsworth would gain considerably by a careful sifting of his work, it is still no easy task to select, from what the winnowing hand would leave, a really representative lyric. His contemporary, de Quincey, may lend a guiding hand. One day, writing specially of the tediousness which spoils Wordsworth's really great poem, *The Excursion*, de Quincey complained that Coleridge had overrated the long poems in comparison with the shorter ones, the lyrics. His longer poems were generally philosophic: his lyrics dealt, as they should, with one subject, or emotion, or personal experience. De Quincey declared that Coleridge had undervalued—

“ by comparison with the direct philosophic poetry of Wordsworth, those earlier poems which are all short, but generally scintillating with germs of far profounder truth. I speak of that truth which

strengthens into solemnity an impression very feebly acknowledged previously. . . . Wordsworth has brought many a truth into life both for the eye and the understanding, which previously had slumbered indistinctly for all men."

This criticism lights up some of Wordsworth's most beautiful lyrics, in which he did unveil truths, possibilities, visions, which were "there" all the time, but which the majority of people had passed without heeding them. Certainly it helps towards the understanding of a singularly lovely lyric, *The Solitary Reaper*, a poem in which Wordsworth, by his choice of adjective in the title, strikes the dominant note:

Behold her, single in the field,  
Yon solitary Highland Lass!  
Reaping and singing, by herself;  
Stop here, or gently pass!  
Alone she cuts and binds the grain,  
And sings a melancholy strain;  
O listen! for the Vale profound  
Is overflowing with the sound.

No nightingale did ever chaunt  
More welcome notes to weary bands  
Of travellers in some shady haunt  
Among Arabian sands:  
A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard  
In spring-time from the cuckoo-bird,  
Breaking the silence of the seas  
Among the farthest Hebrides.

Will no one tell me what she sings?—  
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow  
For old, unhappy, far-off things,  
And battles long ago:  
Or is it some more humble lay,  
Familiar matter of to-day?  
Some natural sorrow, loss or pain,  
That has been, and may be again?

\* \* \* \* \*

If Wordsworth's verse is like a lute echoing across the spacious country's coverts and shades, Coleridge's could resemble some elfin violin, most human of instru-

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ments, yet here seeming to be played by some other than a quite human hand:

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan  
A stately pleasure-dome decree:  
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran  
Through caverns, measureless to man,  
Down to a sunless sea.

\* \* \* \* \*

But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted  
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!  
A savage place! as holy and enchanted  
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted  
By woman wailing for her demon-lover!  
And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,  
As if this earth in fast quick pants were breathing,  
A mighty fountain momentarily was forced:  
Amid whose swift half-intermittent burst  
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,  
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail:  
And 'mid these dancing rocks at once and ever  
It flung up momentarily the sacred river.  
Five miles meandering with a mazy motion  
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,  
Then reached the caverns measureless to man,  
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean;  
And 'mid this tumult, Kubla heard from far  
Ancestral voices prophesying war!

I have chosen these particular poems, partly to show the wide range of the Poets of the so-called Romantic School. One, of Byron's, will add still another note, the classic tradition in a romantic dress. It is his *Invocation to the Spirit of Achilles*:

Beautiful shadow  
Of Thetis's boy!  
Who sleeps in the meadow  
Where grass grows o'er Troy.  
From the red earth, like Adam,  
Thy likeness I shape  
As the being who made him  
Whose actions I ape.  
Thou clay, be all glowing,  
Till the rose in his cheek  
Be as fair as when blowing  
It wears its first streak!

Ye violets, I scatter,  
 Now turn into eyes !  
 And thou, sunshiny water,  
 Of blood take the guise !  
 Let these hyacinth boughs  
 Be his long flowing hair,  
 And wave o'er his brows,  
 As thou wavest in air !  
 Let his heart be this marble  
 I tear from the rock.  
 But his voice as the warble  
 Of birds on yon oak !  
 Let his flesh be the purest  
 Of mould, in which grew  
 The lily root surest,  
 And drank the best dew !  
 Let his limbs be the lightest  
 Which clay can compound,  
 And his aspect the brightest  
 On earth to be found !  
 Elements near me  
 Be mingled and stirr'd,  
 Know me and hear me,  
 And leap to my word !  
 Sunbeams awaken  
 This earth's animation !  
 'Tis done ! He hath taken  
 His stand in creation !

Such compounding of human beauty out of the world's elements, and more particularly out of flowers, is old in literature. In our own it goes back, as we have seen, to the creation of Blodeuwedd in the *Mabinogion*, and it recurs in one poet after another. The mass, and still more the quality, of the poems which belong to the first four decades of the nineteenth century—and many perhaps have been omitted here, notably of Campbell, Moore and Southey, though only for considerations of space—must always light those years with an unquenchable glow.

The middle years of Queen Victoria's reign were filled with the popularity of Tennyson, and the much more gradual rise of Browning into public favour. This world's thoughts and desires seem, though some people

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talk of "continuous progress," not to rise steadily and always higher and higher, but rather to ebb and flow like the sea's tides. Just now it is the fashion, in some circles, to think very lightly of these two poets. But as we look back over the long course of our literature and see how the slow judgement of Time has valued our Poets' work, snuffing out one man's popularity, digging out, from forgetfulness, the poems of another, we feel that the future will probably strike a mean, at any rate in Tennyson's case, between extravagant praise and depreciation: it can hardly refuse him the credit of supreme craftsmanship joined to a gift of golden music. Browning will probably never be really popular, but his greatest work cannot be permanently belittled. No one will deny that his verse was sometimes rugged, as it followed the difficult steps of his often involved thought. Yet it could be rarely musical, as in the lines *O lyric Love* already quoted, and in others still to be cited.

Whatever the exact form of Time's verdict may be, if these two poets are deposed, their age will afford no substitutes as great.

Tennyson's great gift of making music with words lasted all his life, from youth to age. *The Dying Swan*, a very early poem, is a striking instance of this melodious handling of language; it may be noticed that the effect is wrought by quite ordinary words:

The wild swan's death hymn took the soul  
Of that waste place with joy  
Hidden in sorrow: at first to the ear  
The warble was low, and full and clear;  
And floating about the under-sky,  
Prevailing in weakness, the coronach stole  
Sometimes afar, and sometimes anear;  
But anon the awful, jubilant voice,  
With a music strange and manifold  
Flow'd forth on a carol free and bold;  
As when a mighty people rejoice  
With shawms, and with cymbals, and harps of gold,  
And the tumult of their acclaim is roll'd  
Thro' the open gates of the city afar  
To the shepherd who watcheth the evening star.



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And the creeping mosses and clambering weeds,  
And the willow-branches hoar and dank,  
And the wavy swell of the souging reeds,  
And the wave-worn horns of the echoing bank  
And the silvery marish flowers that throng  
The desolate pools and creeks among  
Were flooded over with eddying song.

This poem deserves careful study by anyone who cares for the workmanship of poetry: the abundance of monosyllables is remarkable, not less so is Tennyson's apt choice of descriptive words—*e.g.*, "hoar and dank," so precisely what a willow often is; and the "thronging" water ranunculus. His gift of music showed itself in infinite variety. For instance, there is a whole world of difference between the melody of *The Dying Swan* and the mirth of this little catchy song:

When cats run home and light is come,  
And dew is cold upon the ground,  
And the far-off stream is dumb,  
And the whirring sail goes round,  
And the whirring sail goes round,  
Alone and warming his five wits,  
The white owl in the belfry sits.

To his music Tennyson added always a most intense observant reality. The above verse is an instance, if not of a matter of vital importance to everybody. Anyone who gets up early knows that cats do not walk home, they run; and are specially annoyed to find their houses still shut up by the slug-a-beds who pretend to own them.

Tennyson was, in fact, what he called Virgil, a—

Landscape-lover, lord of language.

In other words, he knew the value of wedding sound and sense. Both of these gifts are conspicuous in these lyrical lines from *The Passing of Arthur*:

So saying, from the ruin'd shrine he stept,  
And in the moon athwart the place of tombs,  
Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men,

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Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang,  
Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping down,  
By zigzag paths and juts of pointed rock,  
Came on the shining levels of the lake.

Then drew he forth the brand Excalibur,  
And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,  
Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth  
And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt:  
For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,  
Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth work  
Of subtlest jewellery.

He kept this power of making melody to the end of his life. When he was over seventy, he wrote these lines about the home of the Roman poet, Catullus—lines as musical as any Catullus himself wrote:

Row us out from Desenzano, to your Sirmione row!  
So they row'd, and there we landed—"O venusta Sirmio!"<sup>1</sup>  
There to me thro' all the groves of olive in the summer glow,  
There beneath the Roman ruin where the purple flowers grow,  
Came that "Ave atque Vale," of the Poet's hopeless woe,  
Tenderest of Roman poets nineteen hundred years ago,  
"Frater Ave atque Vale"<sup>2</sup>—as we wander'd to and fro  
Gazing at the Lydian laughter of the Garda lake below  
Sweet Catullus's all-but-island, olive-silvery Sirmio!

Yet once more, when he was between eighty and eighty-one, after a serious illness, he made this poem, as he was crossing the Solent: of it, he said, "It came in a moment." Its music, specially in the second verse, is the rhythm, the unforgettable rhythm of the sea at night, the sea in the Channel, at the western end of the Isle of Wight, as the tide comes up into Scratchell's Bay:

Sunset and evening star,  
And one clear call for me!  
And may there be no moaning of the bar,  
When I put out to sea,

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,  
Too full for sound or foam,  
When that which drew from out the boundless deep  
Turns again home.

---

<sup>1</sup> O beautiful Sirmio!

<sup>2</sup> Brother, hail and farewell.

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Twilight and evening bell,  
And after that the dark !  
And may there be no sadness of farewell,  
When I embark;

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place  
The flood may bear me far,  
I hope to see my Pilot face to face,  
When I have crost the bar.

When we turn from Tennyson to Browning, there is less abundant choice, because the dramatic sense was much stronger in him than the lyrical. The outburst of sudden song in *The Ring and the Book*, "O lyric Love," has already been quoted. Scattered through his narrative poems are scraps either of real lyrics, as in *Paracelsus*, or of song-like verse. Of the latter, an excellent instance, showing both his sensitiveness to sound and his feeling for colour, may be taken from the opening of *Cleon*, the lines where the philosopher thanks the "tyrant" Protus for his gift:

The master of thy galley still unlades  
Gift after gift; they block my court at last  
And pile themselves along its portico  
Royal with sunset, like a thought of thee:  
And one white she-slave from the group dispersed  
Of black and white slaves (like the chequer-work  
Pavement, at once my nation's work and gift,  
Now covered with this settle-down of doves),  
One lyric woman, in her crocus vest  
Woven of sea-wools, with her two white hands  
Commends to me the strainer and the cup  
Thy lip hath bettered ere it blesses mine.

What words could better recall the coming to earth of a flight of doves? Browning could, if he wished, write lyrics pure and simple, such as the *Cavalier Songs*, *As I ride*, or Paracelsus' beautiful song, *Over the Sea our Galleys went*. It is a curious, characteristic fact, that to one of his most involved, complicated poems, *The Two Poets of Croisic*, he deliberately prefixed one of the simplest lyrics he ever wrote:

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Such a starved bank of moss  
Till that May morn,  
Blue ran the flash across:  
Violets were born !

Sky—what a scowl of cloud  
Till, near and far,  
Ray on ray split the shroud  
Splendid, a star !

World—how it walked about  
Life with disgrace  
Till God's own smile came out:  
That was thy face !

The last poem Browning wrote was, like Tennyson's *Crossing the Bar*, a gallant farewell to life here. It is not so melodious as Tennyson's, but it has a ringing music, like a silver trumpet's call, specially in this verse, when he calls himself:

One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,  
Never doubted clouds would break,  
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,  
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,  
Sleep to wake.

It is impossible to say which of these two poets Time's verdict will crown as the greater. Possibly future critics may refuse to judge between them, and wisely, since they are so different. However that may be, they completely overshadowed the rest of the poets alive in the middle years of the Victorian period. But they were by no means solitary, nor can the men whom they, as it were, crowded out, be forgotten or passed by. Two certainly will be remembered as writers of lyrics; another, Coventry Patmore, as the maker of odes of an elusive and unique type. Matthew Arnold, never in the front rank, was yet a true and most careful craftsman and, in spite of his melancholy, a lyrist. He had the gift of penetration, diving through appearances to the hidden reality of things. This is conspicuous in the following verses from his *Lines in Kensington Gardens*, not, some people might

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hastily think, the happiest place for the withdrawn rest of a poetical Oxford man:

In this lone, open glade I lie,  
Screen'd by deep boughs on either hand;  
And at its end, to stay the eye,  
Those black-crown'd, red-boled pine-trees stand !

Birds here make song, each bird has his,  
Across the girdling city's hum.  
How green under the boughs it is!  
How thick the tremulous sheep-cries come !

Sometimes a child will cross the glade  
To take his nurse his broken toy;  
Sometimes a thrush flits overhead  
Deep in her unknown day's employ.

Here at my feet what wonders pass,  
What endless, active life is here !  
What blowing daisies, fragrant grass !  
An air-stirr'd forest, fresh and clear.

\* \* \* \* \*  
Calm soul of all things ! make it mine  
To feel, amid the city's jar,  
That there abides a peace of thine,  
Man did not make, and cannot mar.

Arnold was a dexterous craftsman. By his choice of that one word " abides," he sealed, both in sound and meaning, the spirit of this song. By its side, it is well to put another, this time blithe on the surface, but with a grave undercurrent, the song of the young harp-player, Callicles, with its delicate pictures and lyrical joy:

Through the black, rushing smoke-bursts,  
Thick breaks the red flame;  
All Etna heaves fiercely  
Her forest-clothed frame.

Not here, O Apollo !  
Are haunts meet for thee.  
But where Helicon breaks down  
In cliff to the sea.

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Where the moon-silver'd inlets  
Send far their light voice  
Up the still vale of Thisbe—  
O speed, and rejoice !

On the sward at the cliff-top  
Lie strewn the white flocks;  
On the cliff-side the pigeons  
Roost deep in the rocks.

In the moonlight the shepherds,  
Soft lull'd by the rills,  
Lie wrapt in their blankets  
Asleep on the hills.

—What forms are these coming  
So white through the gloom ?  
What garments out-glistening  
The gold-flower'd broom ?

\* \* \* \*

'Tis Apollo comes leading  
His choir, the Nine.  
—The leader is fairest,  
But all are divine.

\* \* \* \*

—Whose praise do they mention ?  
Of what is it told?—  
What will be for ever;  
What was from of old.

First hymn they the Father  
Of all things; and then  
The rest of immortals,  
The action of men.

The day in his hotness,  
The strife with the palm;  
The night in her silence,  
The stars in their calm.

Probably, no one ever thought, no one ever will think, Frederic Myers a great poet; but he had a lyrical faculty which was unlike that of any one of his contemporaries. The following verses, to a young girl dancing, may not be in the highest flights of poetry:

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Beautiful darling !  
Light of mine eyes !  
Gay as the starling  
Shoots thro' the skies ;

Swift as the swallow, and  
Soft as the dove ;  
Hopeless to follow, and  
Maddening to love !

Ah when she dances ! and  
Ah when she sings !  
Glamour of glances, and  
Rush as of wings,—

Trill as of coming birds  
Heard unaware,—  
Poise as of humming birds  
Hanging in air !

Starriest, youthfullest  
Flower of a face !  
Who shall the truthfulest  
Tell thee thy grace ?

\* \* \* \*

First-rate or not, it is a fact that more than thirty years ago this poem was read aloud, the whole of it, to a Third Form in a grimy Lancashire city. In that class slumbered or played a very musical but otherwise extraordinarily unlaborious child. After the lesson she came to the mistress, her eyes alight, and said: "I never knew before that words could sound like music."

A great critic, Walter Pater, reminded some of us who are now elderly, that every generation of young men and women finds a special joy and refreshment in the poetry of its own age. Other poets may be greater, but those of our youth have our feelings and thoughts, and the voices we wished we had. In *Gaston de Latour*, Pater spoke of "inquisitive youth" by good luck becoming aware of the literature of his own day. Therefore this book shall not end with Victorian lyrics. The "Anglo-Irish" School has been continuously active since the

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"Nineties"; perhaps no poem of theirs is more obviously made of that shimmering stuff which seems as if it would break and dissolve if it were touched than this of Mr. Yeats, which, with all its seeming frailty, is made of the only enduring stuff—love which gives its all:

Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths  
Enwrought with golden and silver light,  
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths  
Of night and light and the half light,  
I would spread the cloths under your feet:  
But I being poor have only my dreams;  
I have spread my dreams under your feet;  
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

The imperishable love of Ireland which is the warp of all her literature shines out in the last verse of Eva Gore-Booth's well-known lyric:

The great waves of the Atlantic sweep storming on their way,  
Shining green and silver with the hidden herring shoal,  
But the Little Waves of Breffny have drenched my heart in spray  
And the Little Waves of Breffny go stumbling through my soul.

A. E. (Mr. George Russell) in his *Gates of Dreamland* has taken a wider sweep of thought and feeling; he begins with Ireland's but ends with the world's vision and desire:

It's a lonely road through bogland to the lake at Carrowmore  
And a sleeper there lies dreaming, where the water laps the shore;  
Though the moth-wings of the twilight in their purples are unfurled,  
Yet his sleep is filled with music by the masters of the world.

There's a hand is white as silver that is fondling with his hair:  
There are glimmering feet of sunshine that are dancing by him there:  
And half-open lips of faery that were dyed a faery red  
In their revels where the Hazel Tree its holy clusters shed.

\* \* \* \* \*

Oh, the great gates of the mountain have opened once again,  
And the sound of song and dancing falls upon the ears of men,  
And the Land of Youth lies gleaming flushed with rainbow light and  
mirth,  
And the old enchantment lingers in the honey heart of earth.



When Joseph Plunkett was shot, after the Dublin Insurrection of 1916, it is more than probable that the world lost one who could have become a fine poet. The following verses may suggest at any rate something of this loss :

I see His blood upon the rose  
And in the stars the glory of His eyes,  
His body gleams amid eternal snows,  
His tears fall from the skies.

I see His face in every flower;  
The thunder and the singing of the birds  
Are but His voice—and carven by His power  
Rocks are His written words.

All pathways by His feet are worn,  
His strong heart stirs the ever-beating sea,  
His crown of thorns is twined with every thorn  
His cross is every tree.

We are too close to the crowd of poets who have been writing since 1890 to sort out the grain from the chaff finally: some had already won their place before then—Alice Meynell, Mary Coleridge, Francis Thompson, Ernest Dowson, A. E. Housman, Henry Newbolt, Robert Bridges. Lately, the English Association has made collections of recent and current poetry, called *Poems of To-day*; most of these seven poets are well served in it. No "collection" can give all, even of the best; and it is waste to reprint the same poems perpetually. So here I have tried to choose, for the most part, so far as room allows, fine poems not in these collections. One, exceptionally suggestive, by Mary Coleridge, seems to have escaped notice. Into it she has swept such lively, vast pictures that we can neither disbelieve nor forget her:

Egypt's might is tumbled down,  
Down a-down the deeps of thought,  
Greece is fallen and Troy Town,  
Glorious Rome hath lost her crown,  
Venice' pride is brought to nought.

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But the dreams their children dreamed,  
Fleeting, unsubstantial, vain,  
Shadowy as the shadows seemed,  
Airy nothing, as they deemed,  
These remain.

Ernest Dowson, too, is often not to be found in Anthologies, yet there is in this poem to a child, not only his wistful, elusive music, but a very human note of general appeal:

Little lady of my heart !  
Just a little longer  
Love me: we will pass and part  
Ere this love grow stronger.

I have loved thee, Child ! too well,  
To do aught but leave thee:  
Nay ! my lips should never tell  
Any tale to grieve thee.

\* \* \* \*

Little lady of my heart !  
Just a little longer  
Be a child: then, we will part  
Ere this love grows stronger.

There is little need to quote from the Poet Laureate, for the English Association has chosen many of his for its popular collection. There is one, seldom quoted, where, with exquisite precision, he has caught the charm of a plant whose fugitive flower is often uncared for, unnoticed even—the sea-poppy which “ grows upon the shore ”:

Her leaves are glaucous-green and hoar,  
Her petals yellow, delicate.

\* \* \* \*

She has no lovers like the red  
That dances with the noble corn !  
Her blossoms on the leaves are shed,  
Where she stands shivering and forlorn.

The pre-war years of the twentieth century were gleaned for verse which appeared in a volume, *Georgian Poetry*, 1911-1912. It included all the years from 1900.

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Two similar collections appeared during the war. In the third of these, three poets—Mr. Turner, Mr. Nichols and Mr. Freeman—stood out conspicuously. Their work was in strong contrast to the more ordinary verse-making which was probably an escape from those years of misery. Mr. Turner's *Ecstasy* deserves to live. The following lines may send some to the poem, published whole in *Poems of To-day* :

I saw a frieze on whitest marble drawn  
Of boys who sought for shells along the shore,  
Their white feet shedding pallor in the sea,  
The shallow sea, the spring-time sea of green  
That faintly creamed against the cold smooth pebbles.

The air was thin, their limbs were delicate  
The winds had graven their small eager hands. . . .

\*       \*       \*       \*       \*

One held a shell unto his shell-like ear  
And there was music carven in his face.

\*       \*       \*       \*       \*

And all of them were hearkening as to singing  
Of far-off voices thin and delicate,  
Voices too fine for any mortal wind  
To blow into the whorls of mortal ears—  
And yet those sounds flowed from their sweet, grave faces.

And as I looked I heard that delicate music. . . .

A notable feature of the post-Victorian years was poetry "of place": the fashion, if it may be so called, had been set, no doubt, by Mr. A. E. Housman's *Shropshire Lad*. One after another, the most characteristic counties—Sussex, Yorkshire, Cumberland—were laid unto contribution, none being as successful in its laureate as Shropshire. Among Mr. Housman's lyrics each of us has his favourite. If one of us is asked, "Why choose that one?" we can only reply as Montaigne did when questioned about his friendship for Etienne de Boétie—*Parce que c'était lui, parce que c'était moi*.

At any rate these verses breathe that love of the

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home-country which can neither die nor be satisfied in any other place whatever:

Far in a western brookland  
That bred me long ago  
The poplars stand and tremble  
By pools I used to know.

\* \* \* \*

There by the star-lit fences,  
The wanderer halts and hears  
My soul that lingers sighing  
About the glimmering weirs.

Mr. Drinkwater, though I think not a native, has caught the peculiar charm of England's premier county when he confesses to the Sussex Downs:

And peace upon your pasture lands I found  
Where grazing flocks drift on continually,  
As little clouds that travel with no sound  
Across a windless sky.

During the war much "soldier poetry" appeared. It was not easy in the strained, over-tense feelings of those days to judge that poetry very critically. I have chosen Mr. Freeman's less for its war-ardour than because, written under war-conditions, it stands in that great line of love for England—England specifically the land south of the Tweed and east of Wales—which burst into song in the midst of John of Gaunt's dying grief:

This royal throne of Kings, this scepter'd isle,

\* \* \* \*

This precious stone, set in a silver sea,

\* \* \* \*

This land of such dear souls, this dear, dear land,

a love which endures throughout our literature. It is the land, the soil, the scenery, England her very self, for which John Freeman was longing in war-stricken France:

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O that I were  
Where breaks the pure cold light  
On English hills,  
And peewits rising cry,  
And gray is all the sky.

Or at evening there  
When the faint slow light stays  
And far below  
Sleeps the last lingering sound  
And night leans all around.

O then, O there  
'Tis English, haunted ground.  
The diligent stars  
Creep out, watch and smile;  
The wise moon lingers awhile.

For surely there  
Heroic shapes are moving,  
Visible thoughts,  
Passions, things divine,  
Clear beneath clear star-shine.

O that I were  
Again on English hills,  
Seeing between  
Laborious villages  
Her cool dark loveliness.

Probably Time's verdict on the Georgians will judge James Elroy Flecker as the most distinguished of them. He stands apart by joining to his great natural abilities a passionate love of beauty and a determined care for the finest craftsmanship. *The Dying Patriot* is not his greatest poem, but it is quoted here for its swinging music with the beat of rimes within the line, and because, though it was published before the patriotism of the enthusiastic days of the Great War's beginning was chastened by disillusionment into grey melancholy, it is almost a prophecy of his own case, as he lay, in 1914, dying in a Swiss health resort, unable to join his peers in what they believed was the Great Adventure for Civilisation:

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Day breaks on England down the Kentish hills,  
Singing in the silence of the meadow-footing rills,  
Day of my dreams, O day!  
I saw them march from Dover, long ago,  
With a silver cross before them, singing low,  
Monks of Rome from their home where the blue seas break  
in foam,  
Augustine with his feet of snow.

Noon strikes on England, noon on Oxford town,  
—Beauty she was statue-cold—there's blood upon her gown:  
Noon of my dreams, O noon!  
Proud and godly kings had built her, long ago,  
With her flowers and tombs and statues all arow,  
With her fair and floral air and the love that lingers there,  
And the streets where the great men go.

Evening on the olden, the golden sea of Wales,  
When the first star shivers, and the last wave pales:  
O evening dreams!  
There's a house that Britons walked in, long ago,  
Where now the springs of ocean fall and flow,  
And the dead robed in red and sea-lilies overhead  
Sway where the long winds blow.

Sleep not, my country, though night is here, afar  
Your children of the morning are clamorous for war:  
Fire in the night, O dreams!  
Though she send you, as she sent you long ago,  
South to desert, east to ocean, west to snow,  
West of there out to seas colder than the Hebrides.  
I must go  
Where the fleet of stars is anchored, and the young Star-captains  
glow.

Among other characteristics of Flecker this poem shows his sense of colour, his love for the shifting shades on metallic surfaces, his care for light, his delight in sheer spaciousness.

The Yorkshire poet, James Mackereth, deliberately left the Georgians' "literary London" for the West Riding, where he makes poetry in peace. In the running, laughing verses of this next poem, all who have ever known them, will find themselves in the open lands of Yorkshire where the winds blow, and the clouds chase

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each other, casting their shifting shadows across the hills and dales, in the great county where there is room to live:

Wind tousles all the whistling corn;  
Hares frolic in the meadow;  
O'er swinging woods this streaming morn  
Go tumbling shine and shadow.

Peewits are toppling down the sky,  
Each bird a lusty liver;  
The hay-grass, flecked with lights that fly,  
Is flowing like a river.

Earth, like a fledgling, longs for wings;  
And, caught in wide commotion,  
My heart is like a ship that swings  
Upon a swinging ocean.

And every sense takes up the tune  
Of birds and clouds and grasses;  
My mind is merry as a moon  
That peeps when darkness passes.

Sweet odours chase the revelling gale,  
Fleet fancies riot after;  
The flying horns of elf-land hail  
A rout that follows laughter.

A cuckoo flings a magic note,  
Then hiccups twice for folly,  
As though the laughter in his throat  
Is mocking melancholy.

Dear God, O give us lips for joy,  
And limbs that spurn the tether,  
A heart in age to play the boy  
And dance in Thy blithe weather !

Not Wat himself, that jolly shepherd, who made so much joy, could have revelled more gaily in the country's unblemished freshness. Mr. Mackereth's power of imagination and vision, together with his careful craftsmanship, all appear in these stanzas, which he wrote in a garden in Nidderdale to *A Bee asleep in a Delphinium Flower* :

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Hush: for His Majesty sleeps soon  
 To-night. Not half awake the moon  
 Drifts like a little patch of cloud  
 Low in the east. All mute and proud  
 The golden west is turning rose.  
 Grave cedars, with their streaks of gloom  
 Across the glory, take the bloom  
 Of sundown; and the garden grows  
 All conscious of the dew. Quite still is  
 The wind that swung the tiger-lilies.

\* \* \* \* \*

Peer softly through this tangled maze  
 Of blossoms set 'gainst opal bays  
 In heavens enchanted; misty bright,  
 All gleaming with a witching light,  
 See! with its clustered azure spires  
 A gorgeous city, tranced and still,  
 The palaced home of Oberon's sires,  
 Throned on its faery hill,  
 Glows 'gainst the sunset's roseate fires.  
 Not dream-built Babylon more fair  
 Than that fantastic city shone.  
 One rests more sumptuously there  
 Than ever King in Babylon  
 Secure with all his dreams' desires.

\* \* \* \* \*

In *such* tower,  
 With *such* heaven-haunted balconies  
 Of sapphire saturate with rose,  
 'Mid seas of scented almond-trees  
 Knew ever Sultan proud repose  
 Such as His Majesty's?  
 Had ever monarch made of dust  
 So rich a chamber? so august  
 A state? or for his dreaming-hour  
 In time such splendid canopy  
 As yonder regal Humble-bee  
 Asleep in that delphinium flower?

Near the beginning of this account of English Lyrics, a Christmas song of York and Lancaster days was quoted. A few years ago, Theodore Maynard wrote one not unworthy to be quoted by it and by those of Southwell and Crashaw. Here are three of the most telling verses:



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Again the royalties are shed,  
Disdiademed the Kingly head,  
He lies again—ah ! very small !—  
Among the cattle in the stall,  
Or in His slender mother's arms  
Is snuggled up from baby harms.

\* \* \* \* \*

No fool need fail to enter in  
The guarded Heaven we strive to win,  
Or miss upon a casual street  
The fiery impress of His feet,  
But touch with every stone and sod  
The extended fingers of our God.

\* \* \* \* \*

No more with silver shrilly blown  
He treads a conqueror, but flown  
With swift and silent whitening wings  
He comes enwrapped in baby things.  
Our God adventures everywhere  
Beneath the cool and Christmas air,  
And setteth still His candid star  
Where Mary and her Baby are.

A Yorkshire poet, Dorothy Una Ratcliffe, has recently published a Christmas song out of the common run, but quite intelligible to those who know that myths and folk-lore belong to the supernatural realm; who care, for example, for William Watson's wistful little satyr the "hoofèd wight, who blew his hands for cold," and in answer to S. Anthony's abrupt question:

"What dost thou here in misery,  
That better far wert dead?"—

"Lorn in the wold," the thing replied,  
"I sit and make my moan,  
For all the gods I loved have died  
And I am left alone.

"Silent in Paphos Venus sleeps,  
And Jove on Ida mute;  
And every living creature weeps  
Pan and his perished flute.

\* \* \* \* \*

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“ A God more beautiful than mine  
Hath conquered mine, they say.—  
Ah, to that fair young God of thine,  
For me I pray thee pray.”

Mrs. Ratcliffe's poem shows the same kind of insight:

Hobs<sup>1</sup> and elfins want to see  
The Christ-Child lying on Joseph's knee.  
They troop to the stable, Christmas night,  
Each with a lantern's prick of light.  
Thro' chinks in roof and door they peep,  
Whist! Little May is longing to sleep.  
Like drifted leaves they heap by the door,  
And tumble in on the hay-strewn floor,  
They perch on the manger; one bold elf  
'Neath Mary's fingers cuddles himself.  
And one on the backs of the drowsy cattle  
Is hopping about with a star-beam rattle.  
The little Christ-Baby crows with glee,  
Cheery as only a baby can be:  
Brownies tickle His curly toes  
And whisper Him secrets no mother knows,  
While Joseph croons, “ Thy Mother is weary,  
Why art thou wakeful, sweet little Dearie?  
How the wind wuthers! Sleep, pretty Doy.<sup>2</sup>  
Hushaby! Hushaby! dear little Joy!”

Mrs. Ratcliffe has shown, too, the age-long English love of animals, pet animals, and that passion for the sea which has always been ours, in this island. *Rake* is typically Yorkshire in many respects, but in its love of a faithful animal it belongs to us all:

There's no better dog than Hardcastle's Rake:  
Not a hundred guineas would Hardcastle take  
For his wall-eyed dog: and Ben is a man  
Who takes good money whenever he can!  
But Rake's worth more to him than brass,  
And Hardcastle loves him more than his lass  
Or his bairns: at least so the dalesfolk say:  
And his old lass laughs with, “ Happen he may,  
For t' bairns are fed by a sheep-dog's work,  
And Rake is a dog 'at niver 'ull shirk;

---

<sup>1</sup> The Yorkshire name for Brownies.

<sup>2</sup> Yorkshire for “darling.”

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On a winter's neet he'll snore on t' hearth,  
An' at slightest stir in t' fold or t' garth,  
He's at our Ben's side; together they 'ull go  
Out on t' moor in hail or snow;  
An' some hours later they'll both come in  
Tired an' famished, an' dirty as sin;  
When our Ben goes on his last long trudge,  
Down t' Valley o' Death, thro' rain and sludge,  
An' gits at last to t' Goolden Gate,  
Theer'll be trouble in Heaven if Rake, his mate,  
Can't pass; our Ben 'ull rampage an' shout  
If ony saint shuts his sheep-dog out,  
If Peter refuses to have him ? By gow,  
At yon gate theer'll be a hell of a row !"

*The Sea-Fool* has struck a new note among lyrics of the sea, and it shows, too, Mrs. Ratcliffe's fine workmanship:

    "Lord of the Lonesome Places !  
    Crazy am I to-night  
    To be where the roller-races  
    Are held in the live moonlight.  
To listen the chant of the ocean-runes  
To watch the swift tide sucking the dunes.  
    Incoming moan,  
    Tangle of foam,  
    Moon-sheeted sands,  
    Sea-weeded strands !  
Nothing may keep me indoors, for the sea  
And the moon are pulling the heart out of me.

    " If the door does not give,  
    Lord of the Lonesome Places,  
Thy poor sea-fool cannot live  
    For long from the foam-fair faces.  
I, the ocean's own dear fool,  
To be caught and caged, to eat by rule,  
When the breakers roar, and the night is cool,  
And the sea is sparkly and beautiful !  
One more blow ! incoming tide !  
Shatter the door ! The dunes are wide !"

    "*When the moon is full he's always wild,  
Pity he did not die when a child.*"

    "Die ? Hands off ! O whips of foam !  
Listen the hurricane's fifty-knot moan !

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Lord of the Lonesome Places! I  
Am not afraid on the shore to die,  
But caught in a trap, like a mouse in a hole,  
To die in the dark like an injured mole!—  
Lord of the Lonesome! set me free  
To spill my crazy life by the sea."

Among our living poets, there is one who should undoubtedly be dear to all real children—Walter de la Mare; not because he writes for children, a process which is bound to fail, but because, as he writes, he has not forgotten how it feels to be a child. It is not easy to choose among his poems. There are, for instance, those full of the enchantment of a place which children, if no one else, know to be haunted: poems like *The Little Green Orchard*, or *A Song of Enchantment*; or full of the sheer love of roaming and dreaming like *If I were Lord of Tartary*. Perhaps *The Ride-by-Nights* combine all these in one:

Up on their brooms the Witches stream,  
Crooked and black in the crescent's gleam;  
One foot high, and one foot low,  
Bearded, cloaked and cowed, they go.  
'Neath Charlie's Wain they twitter and tweet,  
And away they swarm 'neath the Dragon's feet.  
With a whoop and a flutter they swing and sway,  
And surge pell-mell down the Milky Way.  
Betwixt the legs of the glittering Chair  
They hover and squeak in the empty air.  
Then round they swoop past the glittering Lion  
To where Sirius barks behind huge Orion;  
Up, there, and over to wheel amain  
Under the silver and home again.

It would surely be impossible to describe more perfectly moonlight when it comes down and scatters Night's darkness than Mr. de la Mare has done in *Silver*:

Slowly, silently, now the moon  
Walks the night in her silver shoon;  
This way, and that way, she peers and sees  
Silver fruit upon silver trees;  
One by one the casements catch  
Her beams beneath the silvery thatch;

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Couched in his kennel, like a log  
With paws of silver sleeps the dog.  
From their shadowy cote the white breasts peep  
Of doves in a silver-feathered sleep;  
A harvest mouse goes scampering by,  
With silver claws and a silver eye;  
And moveless fish in the water gleam,  
By silver reeds in a silver stream.

No doubt, all good children should have been in bed and asleep. Evidently, Mr. de la Mare was not, so he can tell other children what they might have seen had they been awake and up with him. In *The Pigs and the Charcoal Burner*, there are not only unforgettable pictures, rare skill in the use of words—especially “greedy,” just where and how it comes in—but there is a mystery for every child to solve if he can: the Charcoal Burner’s secret, for he certainly had one, or what was he doing, doing nothing there?—

The Old Pig said to the little pigs,  
“In the forest is truffles and mast;  
Follow me then, all ye little pigs,  
Follow me fast!”

The Charcoal-burner sat in the shade,  
With his chin on his thumb,  
And saw the Big Pig and the little pigs  
Chuffing come.

He watched 'neath a green and giant bough,  
And the pigs in the ground  
Made a wonderful grisling and gruzzling  
And greedy sound.

And when, full fed, they were gone, and Night  
Walked her starry ways,  
He stared with his cheeks in his hands  
At his sullen blaze.

Then again, how cleverly in *Bunches of Grapes*, though he is only writing what solemn people call “nonsense,” and only takes three verses to do it in, he manages to

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tell us the differences of those three children, so that when we meet them, we shall know at a glance which is which :

" Bunches of grapes," says Timothy;  
" Pomegranates pink," says Elaine;  
" A junket of cream and a cranberry tart  
For me," says Jane.

" Love-in-a-mist," says Timothy;  
" Primroses pale," says Elaine;  
" A nosegay of pinks and mignonette  
For me," says Jane.

" Chariots of gold," says Timothy;  
" Silvery wings," says Elaine;  
" A bumpity ride in a waggon of hay  
For me," says Jane.

Mr. de la Mare can write of more serious matters. His poem, *Music*, will mean much to musical boys and girls, if some others cannot wholly grasp it :

When music sounds, gone is the earth I know.

\* \* \* \* \*

When music sounds, all that I was I am  
Ere to this haunt of brooding dust I came;  
And from Time's woods break into distant song  
The swift-winged hours, as I hasten along.

Still, his peculiar charm is due to his gift—the most precious any of us can have in a difficult world—of having kept the heart of a child. Only a man who had done so could have written *Myself*, shot all through as it is with youth's elusive fancy :

There is a garden grey  
With mists of autumn-tide.

\* \* \* \* \*

Along the lonely paths,  
A little child like me,  
With face, with hands like mine  
Plays ever silently.

\* \* \* \* \*

And I am there alone;  
Forlornly, silently,  
Plays in the evening garden  
Myself with me.

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It is interesting to find that in the eighteenth century James Hogg had some touch of this gift of deathless youth:

Where the pools are bright and deep,  
Where the grey trout lies asleep,  
Up the river and over the lea,  
That's the way for Billy and me.

Where the blackbird sings the latest,  
Where the hawthorn blooms the sweetest,  
Where the nestlings chirp and flee,  
That's the way for Billy and me.

Where the mowers mow the cleanest,  
Where the hay lies thick and greenest,  
There to trace the homeward bee,  
That's the way for Billy and me.

Where the hazel bank is steepest,  
Where the shadow falls the deepest,  
Where the clustering nuts fall free,  
That's the way for Billy and me.

If some Puck among publishers had bethought himself to print these verses from Hogg's *A Boy's Song*, in among Mr. de la Mare's poems, not every reader perhaps would suspect them of being aliens, nor have any feeling that they were incongruous among their company. Mr. Tolkien, who appeared among the "Oxford Poets," in 1915, wrote a delightful poem of this kind, *Goblin Feet*. It has not Mr. de la Mare's guileful guilelessness quite; but it cares for the things for which children care:

I am off down the road  
Where the fairy lanterns glowed  
And the little pretty flittermice are flying:  
A slender band of grey  
It runs creepily away  
And the hedges and the grasses are a-sighing.

The air is full of wings,  
And of blundering beetle-things,  
That warn you with their whirring and their humming.  
O, I hear the tiny horns  
Of enchanted leprechauns  
And the padding feet of many gnomes a-coming!

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O ! the lights: O ! the gleams: O ! the little tinkly sounds:  
O ! the rustle of their noiseless little robes:  
O ! the echo of their feet—of their little happy feet.  
O ! their swinging lamps in little starlit globes.

I must follow in their train  
Down the crooked fairy lane  
Where the coney-rabbits long ago have gone,  
And where silverly they sing  
In a moving moonlit ring  
All a-twinkle with the jewels they have on.  
They are fading round the turn  
Where the glow-worms palely burn  
And the echo of their padding feet is dying !  
O ! it's knocking at my heart—  
Let me go ! O ! let me start !  
For the little magic hours are all a-flying.

O ! the warmth ! O ! the hum ! O ! the colours in the dark !  
O ! the gauzy wings of golden honey-flies !  
O ! the music of their feet—of their dancing goblin feet !  
O ! the magic ! O ! the sorrow when it dies.

*Goblin Feet* stands rather more than half-way from Mr. de la Mare's spontaneous child-like attitude, and rather less than that from the following rather mild specimen of the fantastic artificiality and self-consciousness of that newer school which was perhaps born of the jazz music, discordant colours, and general clatter which, lately, so many people have so much sought after and apparently enjoyed. Miss Sitwell's *The King of China's Daughter* is not, perhaps, quite at home here, varied as the selection has been. But a narrow view of Poetry leads to loss; and it is at least interesting to see how brains and invention can work, without, in the end, telling us very much. Moreover, if we learn nothing else, we shall discover that in Poetry Love is still King:

The King of China's daughter,  
She never would love me  
Though I hung my cap and bells upon  
Her nutmeg tree.  
For oranges and lemons,  
The stars in bright blue air,  
(I stole them long ago, my dear)  
Were dangling there.



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The Moon did give me silver pence,  
The Sun did give me gold,  
And both together softly blew  
And made my porridge cold;  
But the King of China's daughter  
Pretended not to see  
When I hung my cap and bells upon  
Her nutmeg tree.

All these lyrics together are but a handful from the harvest-fields of twelve centuries, from the day when the "Wanderer" "rowed with his hands over the rime-cold sea" until to-day. They are of varying value and interest, and this of set purpose, because out of so diversified a choice, it can hardly be possible that any child, handling this book, should fail to find at least one to bring, to the happy chooser, Poetry's secret.

## CHAPTER V

### BALLADS

THE Ballad is generally reckoned as a special form of the Lyric. Probably, in all races which attempt verse at all, it is the earliest, the most spontaneous or natural form of song, and is at first a great means of handing down stories of the past life of a nation. The song of Deborah and Barak which is recorded in the Book of Judges, has been called "the oldest and most important source we have for the history of the people of Israel"; that is, of course, for their history in their early days in Palestine, before the establishment of the monarchy.

In our own literature, ballads occur early. Besides being natural outlets for feeling, they are one of those forms of art which are used for teaching purposes, when most people cannot read. It is very difficult for us now really to picture a state of things when only a few people could read, although we are told, and we know, without realising the full meaning of the fact, that before the invention of printing, the majority of men and women in Western Europe had no books, and did not know how to read anything written. Such a condition was unavoidable when every book in existence was copied by hand. This copying was, for the most part, executed in the Writing Schools which belonged to the great monastic Orders: but however hard the monks worked, they could not produce many copies. England had to wait till about 1576; then William Caxton set up his first printing-press in Westminster. From that time onwards books were multiplied more and more quickly; this stimulated more people to learn to read.

But the sixteenth century had passed away before any great change occurred in the numbers who could read; and that is only about 325 years ago. Through all the centuries of Europe's growing civilisation, some means of teaching the mass of people what they really needed to know had to be devised. Three great ways were invented. For the purposes of religion, churches were built which by architecture, sculpture and painted glass, taught people by their sight. The acting of plays and the singing of ballads were used too, partly for religious, partly for secular teaching.

We need only go to some of the great Gothic Cathedrals built in France and England between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries to see how the sculptors, almost all of whom did their beautiful work without caring to leave any record of their own names, and the glass-painters carved and painted representations of the great central facts of Christianity. Among them, we find the Creation, the Fall, the story of the Incarnation, the Passion and Crucifixion, the Resurrection, the Last Judgement. If we care to see how these things, marvellously and gloriously wrought in stone, were put before our ancestors who could not read, we need but go and look at and learn from the great West Fronts of the Cathedrals of Amiens, Notre Dame de Paris, Chartres, Bourges in France, or our own Wells, Lincoln, Lichfield (much restored) in England. The Puritans in the sixteenth century destroyed much of this work in England, with painful thoroughness at Ely; the mob, during the French Revolution, and the German guns, which almost completely destroyed the sculpture at Reims, have deprived France of much. But there is a great deal, and some of the best, left. If we would see these stories told in stained glass, we must go to Chartres, and to those other Cathedrals whose windows were executed in the Chartres school, specially Bourges, Tours, and Le Mans. In England we may go to Canterbury, and York and Lincoln, for the very best which, amongst us, has escaped destruction. There, the story

of the Christian religion is painted before men's eyes; whether they can read or not matters little, if they look at the jewelled splendour, which has been described as being at Chartres like a torrent of gems poured out in front of a furnace seven times heated.

But there was not a great Cathedral everywhere, so this means of teaching needed to be supplemented. Therefore, in early days, wandering ballad-singers did some of the work for which books are used now. At one time a ballad-monger would teach people the truths of religion, but more often he concerned himself with the daily affairs of secular life, great deeds of battle, heroic exploits of all kinds and so forth.

The arts of sculpture and glass-painting were devised deliberately as a means of teaching religion. But, in the case of ballads, a natural instinct, the spontaneous impulse to sing, was seized upon and turned to account for teaching purposes, occasionally for religious, but more commonly for other purposes. In its beginnings, the drama seems to have had a natural connexion with religion. Certainly in England sacred plays were acted before the others.

The seventeenth-century satirist Dryden, speaking of ballads, said:

Thespis,<sup>1</sup> the first professor of our art,  
At country wakes sung ballads from a cart.

The far-reaching influence and power of ballads was described by Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun thus:

I knew a very wise man that believed that if a man were permitted to make all the ballads, he need not care who should make the laws of a nation.

The fact that the same stories are found over and over again in the ballads of quite different European nations shows how deeply rooted in the human heart is the instinct to "sing a tale." We know the name and person of one Early English ballad singer and maker,

<sup>1</sup> A Greek poet of the sixth century, B.C.

Aldhelm; in the seventh century he was Abbot of Malmesbury and Bishop of Sherborne. He sprang from the Wessex Royal House, and was educated at Winchester, probably by Irish scholars. A delightful letter of his, written about 680, to his old teacher, Bishop Hæddi, describes troubles not unfamiliar to some of us. After some account of his literary work, of his difficulties with "hundreds of metres" hard to deal with "because of the small number of teachers to be found," he closed with a confession which may wring sympathy even from some twentieth-century children, when teachers abound:

As to the principles of arithmetic, what shall be said? when the despair of doing sums oppressed my mind, so that all the previous labour spent on learning, whose most secret chamber I thought I knew, already seemed nothing, and to use Jerome's<sup>1</sup> expression, I who before thought myself a past master began again to be a pupil, until the difficulty solved itself, and at last, by God's grace, I grasped after incessant study the most difficult of all things, what they call fractions.

This great scholar did not disdain to stand upon the town bridge, singing songs to waylay the traders entering or leaving the town, in the hope that they might follow him, and so give him the chance of turning them to Christianity.

A few quite early ballads remain. There is the fragment, *The Fight at Finnesburg*, but the hero of that is a Frieslander, not an Englishman. In the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, our earliest record of national history up to the death of Stephen in 1154, we find no prose entry, as usual, under the date 937, but a short ballad about a battle at Brunanburgh, where King Æthelstan and his heir and brother Edmund defeated Anlaf the Dane. Lord Tennyson rendered it into modern English, and it can be found in his collected poems. Just by

<sup>1</sup> S. Jerome, A.D. 331-420, one of the most learned of the Latin Fathers of the Church, Secretary to the Roman See under Pope Damasus, the translator who made the rendering of the Bible known as the Latin Vulgate.

## BALLADS

way of comparison, it may be of interest to include here a literal translation from the original; and contrast it with Tennyson's polished stanzas. Speaking of Æthelstan and Edmund the old ballad-maker cries:

They left behind them, the corpses to devour,  
The sallow kite, and the swarthy raven  
Horn-billed, and the dusky raven,  
The earn<sup>1</sup> white-tailed, the corpse to enjoy,  
Greedy war-hawk, and the grey beast  
Wolf of the woods.

Tennyson renders these lines thus:

Many a carcase they left to the carrion,  
Many a livid one, many a sallow-skin—  
Left for the white-tail'd eagle to tear it, and  
Left for the horny-nibb'd raven to rend it, and  
Gave to the garbaging war-hawk to gorge it, and  
That grey beast the wolf of the weald;

and the gain of melody involves some loss of the original's precise meaning and grim force.

In the year 975, the entry in the *Chronicle* is again not prose, but a tiny ballad on the death of Edgar:

Here ended the joys of earth; Edgar, of Angles King,  
Chose him another light, beauteous and winsome,  
And left this frail, this barren life.

A beautiful and quaint ballad has survived from the fifteenth century called *S. Stephen and King Herod*, which gives a quite new account of that Saint. It may be put into a modern dress, but of course loses some of its charm in the process:

S. Stephen was a clerk in King Herod's Hall,  
And served him with bread on cloth, as every King befall.

Stephen out of kitchen came, the boar's head on his hand,  
He saw a star, fair and bright, over Bethlehem stand.

He cast adown the boar's head, and went into the hall,  
I forsake thee, King Herod, and thy works all.

---

<sup>1</sup> Eagle.

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I forsake thee, King Herod, and thy works all,  
There is a Child in Bethlehem born, is better than us all.

What aileth thee, Stephen, what does thee befall?  
Lacketh thee either meat or drink in King Herod's Hall?

Lacketh me neither meat nor drink in King Herod's Hall,  
There is a Child in Bethlehem born, is better than us all.

What aileth thee, Stephen, art mad, or beginnest to brede?<sup>1</sup>  
Lacketh thee either gold or fee, or any rich weed?<sup>2</sup>

Lacketh me neither gold nor fee, nor any rich weed,  
There is a Child in Bethlehem born, shall help us at our need.

That is just as true, Stephen, just as true, I wis,  
As that this capon shall crow, that lieth here in my dish.

That word was no sooner said, than loud in that hall  
The capon crew, *Christus natus est*,<sup>3</sup> among the lords all.

Rise up, my tormentors, by two and also by one,  
And lead Stephen out of this town, and stone him with stone.

Took they Stephen then and stoned him in the way,  
And therefore is his vigil on Christ's own day.

It will be noticed that this Middle-English setting provides Herod on the first Christmas Day with the traditional English Christmas boar's head.

The ballads which really form one of the glories of our literature may, roughly speaking, be divided into three groups: the Northern Border Ballads, those of Robin Hood, and the Jacobite.

The Border Ballads, collected at different times by various persons, provide an unsolved problem as to their original dates. In 1765, Bishop Percy published a collection he had gathered under the title *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*. Sir Walter Scott, early in the nineteenth century, recovered and published many, calling them *Border Minstrelsy*. The subjects of these ballads differ widely: some are supernatural, like *Thomas the Rhymer*, or *The Demon Lover*; some have or seem

<sup>1</sup> An obsolete verb, meaning to spread a false report, or invent.

<sup>2</sup> Garment.

<sup>3</sup> Christ is born.

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to have some historical foundation like *Chevy Chace*, or *Sir Patrick Spens*. Others are songs of border raids and cattle-lifting, like the ever delightful *Hughie Graham*, *Johnny Armstrong* and *Kinmont Willie*. Many are ballads of love, generally of that which does not run smoothly, like the *Douglas Tragedy*, *Lord Ronald*, *Young Waters* and *Glasgerion*. Some are elegiac, like *Helen of Kirkconnell*, and *Barthram's Dirge*. Sometimes they are little more than nursery songs, like *The Wee Croodlen Doo*, or *The Cattie Sings in the Kiln-Ring Spinning*. Very few indeed are intended to be purely comic.

Of the supernatural ballads, *Thomas the Rhymer stolen by the Queen of Elfland* is a good example. It is undoubtedly old. There is a long and very attractive version of it in the Thornton MSS., preserved in the library of Lincoln Cathedral, which probably belongs to the fourteenth century; but part of a shorter version from Sir Walter Scott's *Border Minstrelsy* must serve here:

True Thomas lay on Huntley bank,<sup>1</sup>  
A ferlie<sup>2</sup> spied he wi' his ee;  
There he saw a lady bright  
Come riding down the Eildon Tree.

Her skirt was o' the grass-green silk,  
Her mantle o' the velvet fine;  
At ilka tett<sup>3</sup> o' her horse's mane  
Hung fifty siller bells and nine.

True Thomas he pu'd aff his cap,  
And louted low down on his knee:  
"Hail to thee, Mary, Queen of Heaven!  
For thy peer on earth could never be."

"O no, O no, Thomas," she said,  
"That name does not belong to me;  
I'm but the Queen o' fair Elfland,  
That hither have come to visit thee.

---

<sup>1</sup> In the north country "a hill."

<sup>2</sup> Wonder or marvel.

<sup>3</sup> Every plait's point, or tassel.



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"Harp and carp,<sup>1</sup> Thomas," she said;  
"Harp and carp along wi' me;  
And if ye dare to kiss my lips  
Sure of your body I shall be."

"Betide me weal, betide me woe,  
That weird shall never daunt me."  
Syne he has kissed her on the lips,  
All underneath the Eildon Tree.

"Now ye maun go wi' me," she said,  
"Now, Thomas, ye maun go wi' me;  
And ye maun serve me seven years,  
Through weal or woe as may chance to be."

She's mounted on her milk-white steed,  
And she's ta'en Thomas up behind;  
And aye, whene'er her bridle rang,  
The steed gaed swifter than the wind.

O they rade on, and farther on,  
The steed gaed swifter than the wind;  
Until they reach'd a desert wide,  
And living land was left behind.

"Now, Thomas, light doun, light doun," she said,  
"And lean your head upon my knee;  
Abide ye there a little space,  
And I will show you ferlies three.

"O see ye not yon narrow road,  
So thick beset wi' thorns and briars?  
That is the Path of Righteousness,  
Though after it but few enquires.

"And see ye not yon braid, braid road,  
That lies across the lily leven?<sup>2</sup>  
That is the Path of Wickedness,  
Though some call it the road to Heaven.

"And see ye not yon bonny road  
That winds about the ferny brae?  
That is the road to fair Elfland,  
Where thou and I this night maun gae.

---

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps "chat gaily."

<sup>2</sup> Lawn.

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"But, Thomas, ye sall haud your tongue,  
Whatever ye may hear or see;  
For speak ye word in Elfin-land,  
Ye'll ne'er win back to your ain countrie."

O they rade on, and farther on,  
And they waded rivers abune the knee;  
And they saw neither sun nor moon,  
But they heard the roaring of a sea.

It was mirk, mirk night, there was nae star-light,  
They waded through red blude to the knee;  
For a' the blude that's shed on the earth  
Rins through the springs o' that countrie.

Syne they came to a garden green,  
And she pu'd an apple frae a tree:  
"Take this for thy wages, Thomas," she said:  
"It will give thee the tongue that can never lee."

"My tongue is my ain," then Thomas he said;  
"A gudely gift ye wad gie to me!  
I neither dought<sup>1</sup> to buy or sell  
At fair or tryst where I might be.

"I dought<sup>1</sup> neither speak to prince or peer,  
Nor ask of grace from fair ladye!"  
"Now haud thy peace, Thomas," she said,  
"For as I say, so must it be."

He has gotten a coat of the even cloth,  
And a pair of shoon of the velvet green;  
And till seven years were come and gane,  
True Thomas on earth was never seen.

The fourteenth century tells the tale with many more details, and introduces much natural description; the following verses will give an idea of its picturesqueness, and very English care for birds and beasts:

I heard the jay and the throstle,  
The song-thrush bemoaned herself in her song;  
The green-woodpecker rang out like a bell,  
So that all the wood about me rung.

\* \* \* \* \*

---

<sup>1</sup> Could.

She<sup>1</sup> led three grey-hounds in a leash,  
And seven hounds ran by her side:  
She bore a horn about her neck  
And full many an arrow in her belt.

*The Demon Lover* is full of such vivid pictures and true melody, that the closing stanzas must be quoted. A supernatural being, in the disguise of a former lover, tempted a woman to leave her home and sail with him across the seas:

They had not sailed a league, a league,  
A league but barely three,  
Until she espied his cloven foot,  
And she wept right bitterlie.

"O hold your tongue of your weeping," says he,  
"Of your weeping now let me be;  
I will show you how the lilies grow  
On the banks of Italy."

"O what hills are yon, yon pleasant hills,  
That the sun shines sweetly on?"  
"O yon are the hills of heaven," he said,  
"Where you will never win."

"O whaten a mountain is yon," she said,  
"All so dreary wi' frost and snow?"  
"O yon is the mountain of hell," he cried,  
"Where you and I will go."

And aye when she turned her round about,  
Aye taller he seemed to be;  
Until that the tops o' the gallant ship  
Nae taller were than he.

He strack the tapmast wi' his hand,  
The foremast wi' his knee;  
And he brake that gallant ship in twain,  
And sank her in the sea.

*Bonnie George Campbell*, from a collection called *The Scottish Minstrel*, published in 1834, is a fine example of the ballad-maker's power of telling a story of several lives in a few lines:

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.*, the Queen of Elfland.

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Hie upon Hielands,  
And low upon Tay,  
Bonnie George Campbell  
Rade out on a day;  
Saddled and bridled  
And gallant to see:  
Hame cam' his gude horse,  
But hame cam' na he.

Out ran his auld mithir,  
Greeting<sup>1</sup> fu' sair;  
Out ran his bonnie bride,  
Reaving her hair.  
He rade saddled and bridled,  
Wi' boots to the knee:  
Hame cam' his gude horse  
But never cam' he.

"My meadow lies green,  
And my corn is unshorn,  
My barn is to bigg,<sup>2</sup>  
And my babie's unborn."  
He rade saddled and bridled,  
Careless and free:  
Toom<sup>3</sup> hame cam' the saddle  
But never cam' he.

There are no other poems in our language like the true *Border Ballads*, which tell of the endless feuds and raids on the borderland between England and Scotland. They are long, too long for wholesale quotation here, but the following stanzas from *Kinmont Willie* are characteristic of their vigour and delightful humour:

O have ye na heard o' the fause Sakelde ?  
O have ye na heard o' the keen Lord Scroope ?  
How they hae ta'en bauld Kinmont Willie,  
On Haribee to hang him up ?

\* \* \* \* \*

They led him thro' the Liddel-rack,  
And also thro' the Carlisle sands;  
They brought him on to Carlisle Castle,  
To be at my Lord Scroope's commands.

---

<sup>1</sup> Weeping.

<sup>2</sup> To build.

<sup>3</sup> Empty.

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"My hands are tied, but my tongue is free,  
And wha will dare this deed avow?  
Or answer by the Border law?  
Or answer to the bauld Buccleuch?"

"Now haud thy tongue, thou rank reiver!  
There's never a Scot shall set thee free;  
Before ye cross my castle yate,  
I trow ye shall take farewell o' me."

"Fear na ye that, my lord," quo' Willie:  
"By the faith o' my body, Lord Scroope," he said,  
"I never yet lodged in a hostelrie,  
But I paid my lawing before I gaed."

Now word is gane to the bauld Keeper,  
In Branksome Ha' where that he lay,  
That Lord Scroope has ta'en the Kinmont Willie,  
Between the hours of night and day.

He has ta'en the table wi' his hand,  
He garr'd the red wine spring on hie—  
"Now Christ's curse on my head," he said,  
"But avengèd of Lord Scroope I'll be!"

"O is my basnet<sup>1</sup> a widow's curch<sup>2</sup>  
Or my lance a wand of the willow-tree?  
Or my arm a lady's lilye hand,  
That an English lord should lightly me!"

"And have they ta'en him, Kinmont Willie,  
Against the truce of Border-tide?  
And forgotten that the bauld Buccleuch  
Is Keeper here on the Scottish side?"

"And have they e'en ta'en him, Kinmont Willie,  
Withouten either dread or fear?  
And forgotten that the bauld Buccleuch  
Can back a steed, or shake a spear?"

"O were there war between the lands,  
As well I wot that there is none,  
I would slight Carlisle Castell high,  
Though it were builded of marble stone.

---

<sup>1</sup> A small light helmet of steel.

<sup>2</sup> Cap.

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'I would set that castell in a low  
And sloken it with English blood !  
There's nevir a man in Cumberland  
Should ken where Carlisle Castell stood.

'But since nae war's between the lands,  
And there is peace, and peace should be;  
I'll neither harm English lad or lass,  
And yet the Kinmont freed shall be.'

In nineteen verses, the ballad tells how Buccleuch  
summoned the marchmen—

With spur on heel, and splent on spauld,<sup>1</sup>  
And gleuves of green, and feathers blue—

and how he took buglers, and "a mason gang" with  
long ladders. He tells how they passed over the  
debatable land, and how, when they had crossed on to  
English soil, the leader, Dickie of Dryhope, was challenged  
for trespass. He met the difficulty adequately—

The nevir a word had Dickie to say,  
Sae he thrust the lance through his fause bodie.

The inconvenient questioner being thus disposed of,  
the succouring band made for Carlisle, and set the  
ladders up. Bold Buccleuch

has ta'en the watchman by the throat,  
He flung him down upon the lead—  
"Had there not been peace between our lands  
Upon the other side thou hadst gaed !"

As they broke into the castle they raised such trumpet-  
calls, and made such a noise that Scroope and his  
followers

thought King James and a' his men,  
Had won the house wi' bow and spear;  
It was but twenty Scots and ten  
That put a thousand in sic a stear !

Anyhow, the thousand stayed in safety while Buc-  
cleuch and his men forced their way through bolts and  
bars to the dungeon :

<sup>1</sup> With shoulder-armour on.

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And when we cam' to the lower prison,  
Where Willie o' Kinmont he did lie—  
"O sleep ye, wake ye, Kinmont Willie,  
Upon the morn that thou's to die?"

"O, I sleep saft, and I wake aft;  
It's lang since sleeping was fley'd<sup>1</sup> frae me;  
Gie my service back to my wife and bairns,  
And a' gude fellows that spier for me."

Then Red Rowan has hente him up,  
The starkest man in Teviotdale—  
"Abide, abide now, Red Rowan,  
Till of my Lord Scroope I take farewell.

"Farewell, farewell, my gude Lord Scroope!  
My gude Lord Scroope, farewell," he cried—  
"I'll pay you for my lodging maill,<sup>2</sup>  
When first we meet on the Border side."

Then shoulder high, with shout and cry,  
We bore him down the ladder lang;  
At every stride Red Rowan made,  
I wot the Kinmont's airns<sup>3</sup> play'd clang!

"O mony a time," quo' Kinmont Willie,  
"I have ridden horse baith wild and wood;<sup>4</sup>  
But a rougher beast than Red Rowan  
I ween my legs have ne'er bestrode!

"And mony a time," quo' Kinmont Willie,  
"I've pricked a horse out owre the furs;  
But since the day I backed a steed,  
I never wore such cumbrous spurs!"

We scarce had won the Staneshaw-bank,  
When a' the Carlisle bells were rung,  
And a thousand men, in horse and foot,  
Cam' wi' the keen Lord Scroope along.

Buccleuch has turned to Eden water,  
Even where it flow'd frae bank to brim,  
And he has plung'd in wi' a' his band,  
And safely swam them thro' the stream.

---

<sup>1</sup> Frightened.

<sup>2</sup> Rent.

<sup>3</sup> Iron fetters.

<sup>4</sup> Mad.

He turned him on the other side,  
And at Lord Scroope his glove flung he—  
“If ye like na my visit in merry England,  
In fair Scotland come visit me!”

All sore astonished stood Lord Scroope,  
He stood as still as rock of stane;  
He scarcely dared to trew<sup>1</sup> his eyes,  
When thro’ the water they had gane.

“He is either himsell a devil frae hell,  
Or else his mother a witch maun be;  
I wadna have ridden that wan water  
For a’ the gowd in Christentie.”

The Jacobite Ballads, the songs of the Royal House of Stuart, belong to the years which lie roughly between 1688 and 1784. When, after the battle of Culloden in 1746, Prince Charles Edward wandered about as a fugitive, the Government having put upon his head a price of £30,000, though he was known to and helped by the poorest people, he was not betrayed to his foes. The rare loyalty and devotion, shown by that single fact, inspires the Jacobite Ballads, and makes them a thing in themselves, not to be mixed up with ordinary songs.

*Wae’s Me for Prince Charlie* is a typical song of this love and devotion, and poignant poetry too:

A wee bird came to our ha’ door,  
He warbled sweet and clearly,  
And aye the o’ercome o’ his sang  
Was, “Wae’s me for Prince Charlie!”  
Oh! when I heard the bonny, bonny bird,  
The tears came drapping rarely,  
I took my bannet aff my head,  
For weel I lo’ed Prince Charlie.

Quo’ I, “My bird, my bonny, bonny bird,  
Is that a tale ye borrow?  
Or is’t some words ye’ve learnt by rote,  
Or a lilt o’ dool and sorrow?”  
“Oh, no, no, no!” the wee bird sang,  
“I’ve flown sin’ morning early;  
But sic a day o’ wind and rain!  
Oh wae’s me for Prince Charlie!

---

<sup>1</sup> Trust.



"On hills that are by right his ain,  
He roams a lonely stranger;  
On ilka hand he's pressed by want,  
On ilka side by danger.  
Yestreen I met him in a glen,  
My heart near bursted fairly,  
For sadly changed indeed was he—  
Oh ! wae's me for Prince Charlie !

"Dark night came on, the tempest howled  
Out-owre the hills and valleys;  
And whare wast that your prince lay down  
Whase hame should been a palace.  
He row'd him in a Highland plaid  
Which covered him but sparely;  
And slept beneath a bush o' broom,  
Oh ! wae's me for Prince Charlie !"

And now the bird saw some redcoats,  
And he shook his wings wi' anger:  
"O, this is no a land for me,  
I'll tarry here no langer."  
A while he hovered on the wing,  
Ere he departed fairly:  
But weel I mind the fareweel strain;  
'Twas "Wae's me for Prince Charlie !"

*Will He no come back again* is another ballad of this love for "Charlie," better known, perhaps, still. Then there are the ballads full of the fighting spirit which inspired the Jacobites before the fatal day of Culloden, *Wha wadna fecht for Charlie? Charlie is my Darling*, and the still more poetic *On by Moss and Mountain Green*, with its ringing last verse calling the clans together:

Hark ! the bagpipe sounds amain,  
Gather, ilka leal man, gather,  
These mountains are a' Charlie's ain,  
These green-sward dells, and muirs o' heather.  
Owre the muir amang the heather,  
Owre the muir amang the heather,  
Wha wadna fight for Charlie's right  
To gie him back his hills o' heather ?

A lovelier ballad of love betrayed and friendship broken than *Glasgerion* can hardly be found. In Ramsay's *Tea Table Miscellany* there is to be found

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a rarely musical ballad, of faithless love, ending in tragedy:

Ye Highlands and ye Lawlands,  
Oh where have you been?  
They have slain the Earl of Murray  
And laid him on the green.

Now wae be to thee, Huntley!  
And wherefore did ye sae?  
I bade you bring him wi you,  
But I forbade ye him to slay.

He was a braw gallant  
And he rade at the ring;  
And the bonny Earl of Murray  
O he might have been a king.

He was a braw gallant  
And he played at the ba';  
And the bonny Earl of Murray  
Was the flower among them a'.

He was a braw gallant  
And he played at the glove;  
And the bonny Earl of Murray  
O he was the Queen's love.

O lang will his lady  
Look o'er the castle Down,  
Ere she see the Earl of Murray  
Come sounding thro' the town.

That last line shows what pomp, power and brilliance can be suggested by one single verb perfectly chosen and placed. As a rule, the ballad form belongs to primitive conditions of life; the form sometimes lasts longer than the genuine ballad spirit. In every century so-called ballads have been written in English, but the three great Groups, of Border, Robin Hood and Jacobite Ballads are incomparably the finest.

Those written more recently have not the same freshness and gusto, nor the lurking tragedy of so many of the older ones. However, two of Mr. de la Mare's, *The Silver Penny* and *The Three Beggars*, do not quite

come into the modern category. Though no one, probably, would rank them with those already quoted, they have a true ballad lilt, and a very real charm. Of the two, *The Silver Penny* is the simpler, the nearer to the old spontaneity, ruthlessness, and, in the second verse, to the old bitter "irony":

"Sailor-man, I'll give to you  
My bright silver penny,  
If out to sea you'll sail me,  
And my dear sister Jenny."

"Get in, young Sir, I'll sail ye  
And your dear sister Jenny;  
But pay she shall her golden locks  
Instead of your penny."

They sail away, they sail away,  
O fierce the winds blew!  
The foam flew in clouds,  
And dark the night grew!

And all the wild sea-water  
Climbed steep into the boat;  
Back to the shore again  
Sail they will not.

Drowned is the sailor-man,  
Drowned is sweet Jenny!  
And drowned in the deep sea  
A bright silver penny.

The *Three Beggar Men*, though more archaic in language, is much more modern in its spirit than *The Silver Penny*, as the following verses of it show:

'Twas autumn daybreak gold and wild,  
While past St. Ann's grey tower they shuffled,  
Three beggars spied a fairy child  
In crimson mantle muffled.

The daybreak lighted up her face  
All pink, and sharp, and emerald eyed;  
She looked on them a little space,  
And shrill as hautboy cried:

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"O three tall footsore men of rags  
Which walking this gold moon I see,  
What will ye give me from your bags,  
For fairy-kisses three?"

The first, that was a reddish man,  
Out of his bundle takes a crust:  
"La, by the tombstone of St. Ann,  
There's fee if fee ye must!"

The second, that was a chestnut man,  
Out of his bundle draws a bone:  
"La, by the belfry of St. Ann,  
And all my breakfast gone!"

The third, that was a yellow man,  
Out of his bundle picks a groat:  
"La, by the Angel of St. Anne,  
And I must go without!"

That changeling, lean and icy-lipped,  
Touched crust, and bone, and groat, and lo!  
Beneath her finger, taper-tipped,  
The magic all ran through.

Instead of crust, a peacock pie,  
Instead of bone, sweet venison,  
Instead of groat, a white lily  
With seven blooms thercon.

And each fair cup was deep with wine:  
Such was the changeling's charity,  
That sweet feast was enough for nine,  
But not too much for three.

\* \* \* \* \*

## CHAPTER VI

### THE TREATISE

THERE is no one word which can cover all the forms which prose takes. I have made a special exception of Essays and Letters: and then it seems best to take the rest in this chapter, under one comprehensive name, the Treatise. Yet, we may still make some divisions. There is the prose of pure history, which tells a story; there is prose full of imagination, not that which makes a picture to-day of what we saw at some past moment, and makes it just as we saw it, but the kind of imagination which fashions new and fresh pictures, and is truly "imaginative prose." Then there is the kind of which great speeches are made, oratorical prose; there is the prose of persuasion. There is controversial prose, which may be used in the service of religion, politics or social and economic affairs, or even in the criticism of literature. This is the language of the pamphlet, something between a treatise and an essay. Lastly, there is devotional prose.

Probably, historical prose is the earliest in time. It certainly was in England. The oldest in any of the languages related to English is in English, or Anglo-Saxon rather; the earliest entry in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is dated A.D. 1, the last 1154. The earlier entries must certainly have been written down long after the dates attached to them. Several old manuscripts, found in different monasteries, exist; these were compiled or copied by different writers.

Up to the time of Bede, who was born, most likely, in 673, these entries were mostly bare matters of fact, written we know not when; certainly many of the events

in the earlier centuries were written down in the manuscripts after Bede's days, written as the chroniclers learned them from different people and sources.

One story, belonging to 784 (the *Chronicle* dates it, however, 755), is believed to be the oldest existing piece of prose in any North European language. It relates the slaying of Cynewulf, who had captured the West Saxon kingdom from his kinsman Sigebert. Cyneard, brother of Sigebert, slew Cynewulf.

The following translation, showing the devotion of his followers to Cynewulf in his life and after his death, may be compared with Wiglaf's loyalty to Beowulf:

The atheling<sup>1</sup> offered money and life to each of them (*i.e.*, to Cynewulf's thanes), and not one of them would accept it; but they continued fighting till they all fell, except one, a British hostage, and he was sorely wounded.

Then upon the morrow, the King's thanes, whom he had left behind him, heard that the King was slain, then rode they thither, and Osric his ealdorman, and Wiferth histhane, and the men whom he had previously left behind. And at the town wherein the King lay slain they found the atheling, and those within had closed the gates against them; but they then went onward. And he then offered them their own choice of land and money if they would grant him the kingdom, and showed them that their kinsmen were with him, men who would not desert him. And they then said, that no kinsman was dearer to them than their lord, and that they never would follow his murderer. And they then bade their kinsmen that they should go away from him in safety; but they said that the same had been bidden their companions who before that had been with the King; then they said, that they no more minded it "than your companions who were slain with the King." And then they continued fighting around the gates until they made their way in, and slew the atheling, and all the men who were with him, except one who was the ealdorman's godson; and he escaped with life, though he was wounded in several places.

Bede, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, relates a dramatic story about the introduction of Christianity to Northumbria, which, though very well known, can never grow stale, because it is both simple and beautiful. I have made the rendering, not from Bede's Latin of the end

<sup>1</sup> Cyneard, Sigebert's heir to the West Saxon kingdom.

of the eighth century, but from King Alfred's Anglo-Saxon translation from Bede which he made at the end of the ninth. Had Bede written in Anglo-Saxon, the quotation from the *Chronicle*, given above, would not be our earliest prose. Bede wrote everything in Latin, save his rendering of S. John's Gospel. The following passage is almost word for word like the original; it may be rough, but I think it preserves something of the old atmosphere. The circumstances which led up to it are these. Edwin, King of the Northumbrians, married Ethelburga, daughter of Ethelbert, the Christian King of Kent. She stipulated that, if she married a pagan, a monk, Paulinus, should be consecrated Bishop, and go with her to Northumbria, so that she would still have a priest and a Church, and worship God as a Christian. After a while, Edwin began to consider the possibility of becoming a Christian: finally, he appointed a day when Paulinus should expound the doctrines of Christianity in public. Paulinus having spoken, Edwin asked for counsel from his assembled head-men. Cêfi, his heathen chief priest, advised him to become a Christian, on the sordid ground that though as priest he himself had served the heathen gods faithfully, he had prospered less than other men who had not done even that. He was, in fact, a materialist, with no understanding of spiritual things. There was, however, an old soldier present, and he, in this often quoted passage, gave Edwin his counsel:

Such to me, O King, appears this present life of man on earth, in comparison with that time which to us is unknown, like as if thou wast sitting, feasting with thine ealdormen and thanes in wintertide; the fire kindled, thy hall warmed, and it rains, and snows and hails and storms without. Comes then a sparrow and quickly flies through the house, goes through one door in, through another door out. Lo! he in the time that he is within, is not wet with the winter's storm; but that is but for the twinkling of an eye and the least instant, and he soon cometh again into the winter of winters. Like him, this life of men appears for a little time; what goes before, or what after, we know not? If, therefore, this new lore bring aught more clear, more fit, it is worth that we follow it.

It is not easy to say whether this is historical or imaginative prose, but in its simplicity and wistfulness, it is, at any rate, intensely English. When King Alfred translated *The Pastoral Care* of Gregory the Great from Latin into Anglo-Saxon, he gave us some contemporary history in his own Preface. He first recalled the condition of England before the Danes overran it, plundering, burning and killing:

The Sacred Orders, how zealous they were, both in teaching and learning, and in all the services they owed to God, and how foreigners came to this land in search of wisdom.

Then he contrasted with this the terrible desolation of his land, which he was trying so hard to repair:

We should now have to get them from abroad if we were to have them.

Then he described, more in detail, the dreadful decay of knowledge and learning, which the Danish incursions had directly caused:

So general was its decay in England that there were very few on this side of the Humber who could understand their rituals in English, or translate a letter from Latin into English, and I believe there were not many beyond the Humber. There were so few of them that I cannot remember a single one south of the Thames, when I came to the throne. . . . I remembered also how I saw before it had all been ravaged and burnt, how the Churches throughout the whole of England stood filled with treasures and books, and there was also a great multitude of God's servants, but they had very little knowledge of the books, for they could not understand anything of them, because they were not written in their own language.

It is not easy in the twentieth century to realise what the ninth was like: so it is no small thing to have this plain description of English civilisation, as it lay wrecked by the Danes, written on the spot by an eye-witness, as any of us might to-day describe contemporary life. Alfred not only preserved the facts for us, but he furnished the men of his own time, by his zeal in translation, with books which they could understand.

It is a pity, for our present purpose, that Latin was



so commonly used instead of English prose, as in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Britons*, written early in the thirteenth century, the source for us of ancient British tales, such as King Lear and King Arthur. Otherwise, we should have the story in our own language of the "ragging" which, as a youth, at the Court of King Æthelstan, S. Dunstan, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury, and always a lover of learning and education, had to bear at the hands of his rough fellow-students. He describes their rudeness, telling how, because he was a student in fact and they only in name, they flung him into a muddy pool. Showing no anger, he shrewdly contrasts their churlishness with the compassion of some big dogs, who, when he had managed to scramble out, came to him "with wagging tails," and licked him clean.

There are rimed Chronicles, like Robert of Gloucester's at the end of the thirteenth and Robert of Brunne's in the fifteenth centuries, which cannot be included in a chapter on prose, save, as an exception, one delightful story, which seems never to find its way into modern books. The boisterous men of Kent, when listening to S. Augustine's preaching, let some of their number stealthily hang a string of fish-tails to the back of the monk's habit. Apparently S. Augustine was gravely annoyed, for Robert of Brunne records that he prayed to God that they should have tails in future, and that all their children should be born with tails, and the story ends with these triumphant lines:

And God granted all that he bade,  
For all that race tails had,  
Tails had, and tails have.

After the Norman Conquest much was written in England, chiefly in Latin and Norman-French. Translations have their value. When they are supremely well made, like the Authorised Version of the Bible, they become a part of the literature of the country into whose tongue they are rendered. It is not, however, worth

while in a chapter on English prose to translate what was produced in England but not in English. One exception shall be made in favour of a delightful thirteenth-century book, *The Anchoresses' Rule*. Who wrote the book, and for whom, is not precisely known, but it was probably addressed to three sisters who had devoted themselves to the religious life. The English manuscript appears to have had a Latin original. The following extract shows the extreme kindliness of the priest who directed these three anchoresses:

Ye shall, my beloved sisters, have no beast but a cat one. Anchoresses who have cattle seem better housewives, as Martha was, than Anchoresses; in no wise can they be Mary with peace of heart. For then must they think of the cow's fodder, and the herdsman's hire, flatter the hedger,<sup>1</sup> recover her when they put her in pound, and moreover pay the damages. However, if anyone must needs have a cow, see that she annoy no man, nor harm any one, and that her own mind<sup>2</sup> be not fixed upon her.<sup>3</sup> An anchoress should have nothing that draws her heart outwards. Carry on no business. An anchoress who traffics sells her soul to the shopman of hell. Take not charge in your house of other men's things, neither cattle, nor clothes.

Such was his minute care that these good women should not be turned from a devout life by anxiety about worldly possessions.

The first genuine English prose after the incursion of the Normans was written by a Yorkshireman, Richard Rolle, the hermit, who was born not far from Pickering about 1300, and who died before he was fifty. He wrote a little poetry: but it is as the author of prose, which is clear in meaning, full of vigour, and musically cadenced, in which he wrote some of the most beautiful religious books in English, that he deserves our love. The following quotation is from a collection of short pieces. I have chosen it because it deals with a matter which touches every one of us, and because it is an excellent

<sup>1</sup> Whose business it was to prevent damage to property by straying cattle.

<sup>2</sup> *i.e.*, the anchoress's mind.

<sup>3</sup> The cow.

example of Rolle's simple, direct teaching which does not leave one loophole through which we can wriggle and escape. Its title is, *By what Tokens thou shalt know if thou lovest thine Enemy* :

If thou beest not stirred against the person by anger or fell outward cheer, and have no privy hate in thine heart for to despise him, or judge him, or for to set him at naught: and the more shame and villainy he does to thee in word or in deed, the more pity and compassion thou hast of him as thou wouldst have of a man who was out of his mind . . . but prayest for him and helpest him, and desirest his amending, not only with thy mouth as hypocrites do, but with the affection of thine heart, thou hast then perfect charity to thy fellow-Christian. . . .

Learn to love thy enemies and sinful men. Look and bethink thee how Christ loved Judas, who was both His bodily enemy and a sinful caitiff: how goodly Christ was to him, how benign, how courteous, how humble to him whom He knew to be damnable; and nevertheless He chose him for His Apostle, and sent him to preach with the other Apostles; He gave him power to work miracles; He shewed to him the same good cheer in word and deed, also with His Precious Body, and preached to him as He did to the other Apostles: He condemned him not openly, nor abused nor despised him, nor ever spake evil of him; and yet, even though He had done all that, He would but have spoken the truth! And above all, when Judas took Him, He kissed him and called him His friend. All this charity, Christ shewed to Judas whom He knew to be damnable. In no manner of feigning nor flattery, but in soothfastness of good love and plain charity. . . . Follow after somewhat if thou canst. . . . Whoso deems himself to be a perfect follower of Jesus Christ's teaching . . . and cannot follow Christ in His love and charity, to love his fellow-Christians, every man, good and ill, friends and foes, without feigning, flattering, despising in heart, angriness and melancholious reproving, soothly he beguiles himself: the nearer he deems himself to be, the further he is.

Save for modernised spelling, this is practically a literal rendering of Rolle. So, in the first half of the fourteenth century, was English prose written. As to its contents, no one need imagine that this counsel was given by one who knew nothing of the difficulties of true forgiveness. Richard was often misunderstood, not seldom ill-treated, and by nature was of the disposition which finds such things hard to bear.

Later on, in this fourteenth century, Walter Hilton,

who lived in Nottinghamshire, wrote several treatises. Among others, he wrote one called *Of Angels' Song*: at least, though some people have supposed Rolle wrote it, it is now generally assigned to Hilton, who died in 1392. The following quotation which I have rendered as literally as possible, and in modern spelling, will give some idea of the sweetness, the peaceful light and joy which suffused fourteenth-century English prose:

On this manner-wise a soul is made spiritual in the sensible part by the abundance of charity which is in the substance of the soul. Also our Lord comforts a soul by angel's song. But what that song is, it may not be described by any bodily likeness, for it is ghostly<sup>1</sup> and above all manner of imagination and man's reason. It may be perceived and felt in a soul, but it may not be told. Nevertheless, I speak to thee as I think. When a soul is purified by the love of God, illumined by wisdom, stabled by the might of God, then is the eye of the soul opened to behold ghostly things, as virtues, angels and holy souls, and heavenly things. Then is the soul able, by cause of cleanness, to feel the touching, the speaking of good angels. . . . Now then methinks that no soul can feel truly angel's song nor heavenly sounds unless it be in perfect charity. But not therefore have all who are in perfect charity felt it, but only that soul that is purified in the fire of the love of God, so that all earthly savour is burnt out of it, and all means hindering betwixt the soul and the angels' cleanness are broken and put away from it.

One very attractive element in this kind of Middle-English prose is its humour. Though these men were trying to help their fellows to reach the very highest perfection, they saw no need to be starched and pompous, solemn and dull over it. There is a treatise, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, whose date and author are unknown. Whoever wrote it, he had this sense of the funny side of things, however serious the things may essentially be. Having set forth how a good life should be lived, he warns his readers of the wisdom of avoiding such comparatively small things as awkward and silly bodily habits:

Some set their eyes in their heads as they were sturdy sheep beaten in the head, and as they should die anon. Some hang their heads on one side, as if a worm were in their ears. Some pipe when

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<sup>1</sup> Spiritual.

they should speak, as if there were no spirit in their bodies. . . . Some men are so cumbered in nice curious questions in bodily bearing, that when they shall hear somewhat, they writhe their heads on one side quaintly and up with the chin; they gape with their mouths as they should hear with their mouth and not with their ears. Some when they should speak point with their fingers, either on their fingers, or on their own breasts, or on theirs that they speak to. Some can neither sit still, stand still, nor lie still, unless they either be wagging with their feet, or else doing somewhat with their hands. Some row with their arms in time of their speaking, as them needed to swim over a great water.

Who can possibly doubt that people well known to the writer furnished the details of these funny portraits?

The next extract comes from a school-book of stories for girls, *Le Sire du Chevalier de la Cour-Landry*, which was popular in England and on the Continent in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The stories were originally collected by an Angevin nobleman for his own daughter. A very literal translation into English was made by an unknown writer; it is interesting as showing us the kind of reading-book which was used then:

There was a woman that had a pie<sup>1</sup> in a cage, that would speak and tell tales of what she saw done. And so it happed that her husband would keep a great eel in a little pond in his garden, to that intent to give it to some of his friends that might come to see him. But the wife, when her husband was out, said to her maid: "Let us eat the great eel, and I will say to my husband that the otter hath eaten him," and so it was done. And when the good man was come, the pie began to tell him how her mistress had eaten the eel. And he went to the pond and found not the eel. And he asked his wife what had become of the eel. And she thought to have excused herself, but he said to her: "Excuse you not, for I know well you have eaten it, for the pie hath told me." And so there was great noise between the man and his wife for eating of the eel. But when the good man was gone, the mistress and the maid came to the pie, and plucked off all the feathers on the pie's head, saying: "Thou hast discovered us about the eel;" and thus was the poor pie plucked. But ever after, when the pie saw a bald or a peeled man, or a woman with a high forehead, the pie said to them, "You told about the eel."

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<sup>1</sup> Magpie.

In the ninth year of Edward IV, that is in 1470, Sir Thomas Malory, of whom little is known save that his family lived at Hutton Conyers, a charming place just off the Thirsk Road, near Ripon, finished his great story of King Arthur and of his Noble Knights of the Round Table. It was first printed by Caxton, in 1485, at his Westminster Press. He wrote a preface to Malory's book in which he said:

I have after the simple conning<sup>1</sup> that God hath sent to me, under the favour and correction of all noble lords and gentlemen, enprised<sup>2</sup> to imprint a book of the noble histories of the said King Arthur, and of certain of his knights, after a copy unto me delivered, which copy Sir Thomas Malorye did take out of certain books of French, and reduced it into English. . . . I, William Caxton, simple person, present this book following, which I have enprised to imprint: and treateth of the noble acts, feats of arms, of chivalry, prowess, hardiness, humanity, love, courtesy and very gentleness, with many wonderful histories and adventures.

Some people call Malory's book a prose epic. Anyhow, it is an English classic; it tells one of the great stories of our country in that fifteenth-century prose which is simple and incomparably expressive. The following passage tells how Arthur pulled out the momentous sword of prophecy:

In the greatest church of London (whether it were Paul's or not, the French book maketh no mention) all the estates were long or day in the church for to pray. And when matins and the first mass was done, there was seen in the churchyard against the high altar a great stone four square like unto a marble stone, and in the midst thereof was like an anvil of steel a foot on high, and therein stuck a fair sword, naked by the point, and letters there were written in gold about the sword that said this: Whoso pulleth out this sword of this stone and anvil is rightwise King born of all England. I command, said the archbishop, that ye keep you within your church, and pray unto God still; that no man touch the sword till the high mass be all done. So when all masses were done, all the lads went to behold the stone and the sword. And when they saw the scripture,<sup>3</sup> some assayed—such as would have been king. But none might stir the sword nor move it. He is not

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<sup>1</sup> Knowledge, skill.

<sup>2</sup> Undertaken.

<sup>3</sup> Writing.

here, said the archbishop, that shall achieve the sword, but doubt not God will make him known. . . .

And upon New Year's Day, the barons let make a justs and a tournament . . . for the archbishop trusted that God would make him known that should win the sword. So, upon New Year's Day when the service was done the barons rode to the field, some to just and some to tourney; and so it happed that Sir Ector, that had great livelihood about London, rode unto the justs, and with him Sir Kay his son and young Arthur that was his nourished brother. . . . So as they rode to the justwards, Sir Kay had lost his sword, for he had left it at his father's lodging, and so he prayed young Arthur to ride for his sword. I will well, said Arthur, and rode fast after the sword; and when he came home, the lady and all were out to see the justing. Then was Arthur wroth, and said to himself, I will ride to the churchyard and take the sword with me that sticketh in the stone, for my brother Sir Kay shall not be without a sword this day. So when he came to the churchyard, Sir Arthur alighted and tied his horse to the stile, and so he went to the tent, and found no knights there, for they were at the justing; and so he handled the sword by the handles, and lightly and fiercely pulled it out of the stone, and took his horse and rode his way till he came to his brother Sir Kay and delivered him the sword. And as soon as Sir Kay saw the sword, he wist well it was the sword of the stone, and so he rode to his father, Sir Ector, and said: Sir, lo here is the sword of the stone; wherefore I must be king of this land. When Sir Ector beheld the sword he returned again and came to the church, and there they alighted all three and went into the church, and anon he made Sir Kay to swear upon a book how he came to that sword. Sir, said Sir Kay, by my brother Arthur, for he brought it to me. How gat ye this sword? said Sir Ector to Arthur. Sir, I will tell you: when I came home for my brother's sword, I found nobody at home to deliver me his sword, and so I thought my brother Kay should not be swordless, and so I came hither eagerly and pulled it out of the stone without any pain. Found ye any knights about this sword? said Sir Ector. Nay, said Arthur. Now, said Sir Ector to Arthur, I understand ye must be King of this land.

There, in simple Middle-English prose, is the story, how Arthur first came to his own, through that naïf fortuitousness in the falling out of events which is so characteristic of primitive tales. It is a great temptation to go on making extracts from this immortal book; to tell, for instance, how an old man brought Sir Galahad—"a young knight the which is of king's lineage, and of the kindred of Joseph of Arimathie"—to the Court of King Arthur, and how this young man took



off his armour and stood there "in a coat of red sendal, and bare a mantle upon his shoulder, that was furred with ermine"; and how, at this old man's bidding, the youthful knight sat down in "the siege perilous,"<sup>1</sup> whereon, beneath a cloth, the legend was written, "this is the siege of Galahad, the haut prince." Or, again, one might quote the passage in the Seventeenth Book, which tells how Galahad prayed that death should come to him when he asked for it, and then heard a voice saying, "Galahad, thou shalt have thy request, and when thou askest the death of thy body thou shalt have it, and then shalt thou find the life of the soul;" and how, shortly after, he was made King of the city of Sarras, and a little later, being at mass, he received communion, as he perceived, at the hands of S. Joseph; and how then and there he made his request that he might die, and having commended Sir Percivale and Sir Bors to God, he kneeled down at the altar to pray, when "suddenly his soul departed to Jesus Christ, and a great multitude of angels bore his soul up to heaven, that the two fellows might well behold it."

Or there is the fine passage describing the great battle between King Arthur and his son, Sir Mordred, who was plotting to become King of England, when, finally, "Arthur smote Sir Mordred under the shield, with a foin<sup>2</sup> of his spear throughout the body more than a fathom;" but himself received a mortal wound from the dying man, and was carried away by Sir Bedivere—the story we know so well from Tennyson's *The Passing of Arthur*—and left this world, saying, "I will into the Vale of Avilion, to heal me of my grievous wound." But there is no more space for these stories; they must be read in the proper place, Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, which can never pass out of England's love while we

<sup>1</sup> This sitting down was the sign that he should find the Sangreal—*i.e.*, the Cup or Dish of the Blessed Sacrament, which, according to tradition, held the Paschal Lamb at the Last Supper, and was taken by Joseph of Arimathea to the Cross when some of our Lord's blood fell into it, and was, later on, brought by Joseph to England.

<sup>2</sup> *i.e.*, a push.



remain a nation and a people. By the time that England reached the sixteenth century, prose was recognised as an art, and the naïf simplicity of the beginnings had passed for ever away, and we find some interesting developments. The first in time, Sir Thomas Elyot's *Book of the Governour*, is probably the first prose treatise on the science of politics and upon education. Elyot devotes two chapters to the causes of the decay of learning. One of these deals with a fact which has always been noteworthy in England—namely, our national carelessness about the qualifications and position of our teachers. Since we all have to learn somehow, this is a matter that concerns every one of us. I have, in quoting Elyot, only modernised his spelling:

The second occasion whereof gentlemen's children seldom have sufficient learning is avarice. For where their parents will not adventure to send them far out of their proper countries, partly for fear of death, which perchance dare not approach them at home with their father; partly for expense of money which they suppose would be less in their own houses, or in a village, with some of their tenants and friends; having seldom any regard to the teacher, whether he be well learned or ignorant. For if they hire a schoolmaster to teach in their houses, they chiefly inquire with how small a salary he will be contented, and never do insearch how much good learning he hath, and how among well-learned men he is therein esteemed, using therein less diligence than in taking servants, whose service is of much less importance, and to a good schoolmaster is not in profit to be compared. A gentleman ere he take a cook into his service, he will first diligently examine him, how many sorts of meats, potages and sauces he can perfectly make, and how well he can season them, that they may be both pleasant and nourishing; yea, and if it be but a falconer, he will scrupulously inquire what skill he hath in feeding, called diet, and keeping of his hawk from all sickness, and how he can reclaim her and prepare her to flight. And to such a cook or falconer whom he findeth expert, he spareth not to give much wages with other bounteous rewards. But of a schoolmaster to whom he will commit a child, to be fed with learning and instructed in virtue, whose life shall be the principal monument of his name and honour, he never maketh further inquiry, but where he may have a schoolmaster and with how little charge.

This strange carelessness, however, is not peculiar to English people. Socrates was aware of it, in the fourth

century before Christ. But Elyot's criticism should not be forgotten, as the inclination to put everything else, even eating and drinking luxuriously, before learning is common enough still among all people and classes.

Towards the end of the sixteenth century, the first Headmaster of Merchant Taylors' School, Richard Mulcaster, drew attention to another important educational matter—namely, that each child should be brought up to follow the occupation best suited to its capacities and tastes. This book is not very easy to obtain now, so this one passage shall be quoted, and not only for what it says, but as an example of plain racy prose of the century:

Wits well sorted be most civil.<sup>1</sup> This I say because to avoid excessive number, choice is one principal help: for in admitting to uses only such as be fit and seem to be made for them pares off the unfit, and lesseneth the number, which yet would be looked unto, even at the very first. . . .

How, then, can civil society be preserved, where wits of unfit humours for service are in places of service? . . . If that wit fall to preach which were fitter for the plough, and he to climb a pulpit which is made to scale a wall, is not a good *carter* ill-lost, and a good *soldier* ill-placed? If he will needs law it which careth for no law, and profess *justice* that professeth no *right*, hath not *right* an *ill-carver*, and *justice* a worse *master*? If he will deal with *physic* whose brains cannot bear the infinite circumstances which belong thereunto, whether to maintain health or to restore it, doth he anything else but seek to hasten death for helping the disease? to make way to murder instead of amendment? to be a *butcher's prentice* for a *master* in *physic*? And so it is in all kinds of life, in all trades of living, where fitness and right placing of wits doth work agreement and ease, and misplacing have the contrary companions disagreement and disease.

Mulcaster was by birth a Cumbrian; he brings to this question of choosing our life's occupation that good sense which is not only commonly attributed to North-countrymen, but which many of them really possess.

During the sixteenth century two books of poetical criticism were written: Sir Philip Sidney's *Apologie for Poetrie*, which appeared in 1580, in which he defended

<sup>1</sup> Convenient.

poetry from its opponents; and George Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poetrie*, published nine years later than Sidney's. A very old subject of literary dispute concerns the comparative value of *matter* and *form* in literature, a comparison, that is, of the stuff of which it is made, and of the manner of its making. Puttenham dealt with this in the third chapter of his Third Book. Here, again, is an instance not only of characteristic English prose, but of sound common sense about a problem which crops up in every age:

Ornament, then, is of two sorts, one to satisfy and delight the ear only by a goodly outward show, set upon the matter with words, and speeches smoothly and tuneably running: another by certain intendments or sense of such words and speeches inwardly working a stir to the mind. That first quality the Greeks called *Enargia*, of this word *argos*, because it giveth a glorious lustre and light. This latter they called *Energia*, of *ergon*, because it wrought with a strong and virtuous operation, and figure breedeth them both, some serving to give gloss only to a language, some to give it efficacy by sense; and so, by that means, some of them serve the ear only, some serve the conceit<sup>1</sup> only and not the ear: there be of them also that serve both turns, as common servitors, appointed for the one and the other purpose, which shall be hereafter spoken of in place.

Probably all critics would agree that the most stately sixteenth-century prose is Hooker's. His object, in his *Ecclesiastical Polity*, was to defend the Church against the Puritans. The book must always remain one of the greatest in English prose. No extracts can give a true idea of it, but this short passage on a good death may at least show how nobly, and with what dignity and with what simplicity he wrote; for here there is no straining after fine language, no adornments of colour, sound or imaginative picture:

Is there any man of worth or virtue, although not instructed in the school of Christ, or ever taught what the soundness of religion meaneth, that had not rather end the days of this transitory life as Cyrus in Xenophon, or, in Plato, Socrates are described, than to sink down with them of whom Elihu hath said, *Memento moriuntur*;<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Here used for "understanding," "thought."

<sup>2</sup> In a moment they die.

## THE TREATISE

“there is scarce an instant between their flourishing and their not being?” But let us which know what it is to die as Absalom or Ananias and Sapphira died, let us beg of God that when the hour of our rest is come, the patterns of our dissolution may be Jacob, Moses, Joshua, David; who leisurably ending their lives in peace, prayed for the mercies of God to come upon their posterity, replenished the hearts of those nearest unto them with words of memorable consolation; strengthened men in the fear of God; gave them wholesome instruction of life, and confirmed them in true religion; in sum, taught the world not less virtuously how to die than they had done before how to live.

In a very different strain, Sir Walter Raleigh, a prisoner in the Tower, writing his *History of the World*, spoke of death. Disillusioned, and weary of trouble, he saw Death as the executioner, the destroyer, or, at best, the leveller of men:

Death . . . puts into man all the wisdom of the world, without speaking a word, which God, with all the words of His Law, promises or threats, doth not infuse. . . . It is therefore Death alone that can suddenly make man to know himself. He tells the proud and insolent that they are but abjects, and humbles them at the instant, makes them cry, complain and repent, yea, even to hate their fore-past happiness. He takes the account of the rich, and proves him a beggar, a naked beggar, which hath interest in nothing but in the gravel that fills his mouth. He holds a glass before the eyes of the most beautiful, and makes them see therein their deformity and rottenness, and they acknowledge it.

O eloquent, just and mighty Death! whom none could advise, thou hast persuaded; what none hath dared thou hast done; and whom all the world hath flattered, thou only hast cast out of the world and despised; thou hast drawn together all the far-stretched greatness, all the pride, cruelty and ambition of man, and covered it all over with these two narrow words, *Hic jacet*!<sup>1</sup>

Hooker, a man of great learning, was a parish priest. Raleigh had frequented the gayest, perhaps the most brilliant Court in Europe. So great a difference of standpoint merits the attention of all who care to sound the possibilities of literature. It is not only the form, of which Puttenham discoursed, which differs: the real diversity lies deep in the thought.

We will leave the sixteenth century with Roger

<sup>1</sup> Here he lies.

## ENGLISH LITERATURE

Ascham's pleasant advice about the upbringing of children. This, since they are the objects of it, should interest children:

The matter lieth not so much in the disposition of them that be young, as in the order and manner of bringing them up, by them that be old, nor yet in the difference of learning and pastime. For, beat a child if he dance not well, and cherish him, though he learn not well, ye shall have him unwilling to go to dance, and glad to go to his books. Knock him always when he draweth his shaft ill, and favour him again though he fault at his book, ye shall have him very loth to be in the field, and very willing to be in the school. Yea, I say more, and not of myself, but by the judgement of those from whom few wise men will gladly dissent, that if ever the nature of man be given at any time more than other to receive goodness, it is, in innocency of young years, before that experience of evil have taken root in him. For the pure, clean wit of a sweet young babe is like the newest wax, most able to receive the best and fairest printing: and like a new bright silver dish never occupied, to receive and keep clean any good thing that is put into it. . . .

Every man sees (as I said before) new wax is best for printing; new clay fittest for working; new shorn wool aptest for soon and surest dyeing; new fresh flesh for good and durable salting. And this similitude is not rude, nor borrowed of the larder-house, but out of his school-house, of whom,<sup>1</sup> the wisest of England need not be ashamed to learn. Young grafts grow not only soonest, but also fairest, and bring always forth the best and sweetest fruit; young whelps learn easily to carry; young popinjays learn quickly to speak.

Ascham's book was published in 1570, two years after his death. Mulcaster's did not appear till 1581. If we compare these passages with the others quoted earlier, we can hardly help seeing that those who wrote on education used a plainer, rougher prose than the stately style of the theologian, Hooker, or the rolling melody of Raleigh, the courtier. These two prepare us for the magnificent and great age of English prose, the seventeenth century.

<sup>1</sup> These images of youth's responsiveness are found in several ancient authors—*e.g.*, Horace, Quintilian, S. Jerome had all used them. Erasmus, the great Dutch scholar, Sir Thomas More's and Dean Colet's friend, had gathered them in one sentence in a pamphlet on Education, published in 1529: "Handle the wax whilst it is soft, mould the clay whilst it is moist, dye the fleece before it gather stains."

\* Quite apart from its religious value and its indestructible holiness, the Authorised Version of the Bible is a collection of unexcelled prose. Very possibly scholars can suggest a few mistranslations from the Hebrew, Greek and Latin manuscripts; but these do not affect its matchless style. It appeared, of course, when the seventeenth century was just beginning its strange struggling life; it was prophetic of the prose to come, so unique in its melody, and of the poetry of that age of political turmoil, which somehow preserved a rare delicacy and fragrance, as harebells and thyme bloom on the rockiest, driest soil. It cannot be necessary to quote from a book which, as the Bible is, is in everyone's hands. Yet, since familiarity, and perhaps careless reading, may have blunted our senses to some chapters, it is worth while to suggest a few which may not have been spoilt by clumsy handling; Deuteronomy, chapters viii and xxiii; Job xxvi; Isaiah xvii, xxxii, xl 12-31 and lxiv; Amos v; Micah vi; Zechariah i, 7-13. The selections are all from the Old Testament, as the lyrical quotations in the third chapter of this book were drawn from it and the Apocrypha, because these seem, nowadays, to be even more neglected than the New Testament. The great names in English seventeenth-century prose are those of Milton, Bacon, Jeremy Taylor, Thomas Hobbes, Sir Thomas Browne, Thomas Fuller, John Donne and Izaak Walton. Perhaps if most people who read it at all, did not read Pepys' *Diary* because it is so funny, they might spare some time to admire the extreme expressiveness of his prose style.

Bacon must be left for another chapter. We will begin with a fine passage from Milton's pamphlet in defence of the liberty of "the Press," the *Areopagitica*: the passage wherein he pleaded the supreme, deathless worth of good books:

I deny not that it is of greatest concernment in the Church and Commonwealth, to have a vigilant eye how books demean themselves as well as men, and thereafter to confine, imprison and do sharpest justice on them as malefactors. For Books are not absolutely dead



things, but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul whose progeny they are: nay, they do preserve as in a phial the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them. I know they are as lively and as vigorously productive as those fabulous Dragons' teeth; and being sown up and down may chance to spring up armed men. And yet, on the other hand, unless wariness be used, as good almost kill a Man as kill a good Book; who kills a Man, kills a reasonable creature, God's Image; but he who destroys a good Book, kills reason itself, kills the Image of God as it were in the eye. Many a man lives a Burden to the Earth, but a good Book is the precious life-blood of a master-spirit embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life. . . . We should be wary, therefore, what persecution we raise against the living labours of public men, how we spill that seasoned life of man preserved and stored up in Books: since we see a kind of homicide may be thus committed, sometimes a martyrdom, and, if it extend to the whole impression, a kind of massacre, whereof the execution ends, not in the slaying of an elemental life, but strikes at that ethereal and fifth essence, the breath of reason itself, slays an immortality rather than a life.

Jeremy Taylor, whose prose lights up the painful years of the Civil War, somewhat as, on a stormy night, suddenly the moon sheds fitful gold upon the sea, told men of two kinds of courage. The first, at some time or other, we all need in the inevitable difficulties of life:

Softness is for slaves and beasts, for minstrels and useless persons, for such as cannot ascend higher than a fair ox, or a servant entertained for vainer offices; but the man that designs his son for noble employments, to honours and to triumphs, to consular dignities and presidencies of councils, loves to see him pale with study, or panting with labour, hardened with sufferance, or eminent by dangers. And so God dresses us for Heaven. He loves to see us struggling with a disease, and resisting the Devil, and contesting against the weaknesses of Nature, and *against hope to believe in hope*, resigning ourselves to God's will, praying Him to choose for us, and dying in all things but *faith* and *its blessed consequents*. . . . For so have I known the boisterous North Wind pass through the yielding air, which opened its bosom and appeased its violence by entertaining it with easy compliance in all the regions of its reception: but when the same breath of heaven hath been checked with the stiffness of a tower, or the united strength of a wood, it grew mighty and dwelt there, and made the highest branches stoop and make a smooth path for it on the top of all its glories: so is sickness and so is the Grace of God: when sickness hath made the difficulty, then God's grace hath made a triumph, and by doubling its power hath created new proportions

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of reward; and then shews its biggest glory, when it hath the greatest difficulties to master. . . . Happy is that state of life, in which our services to God are the dearest and most expensive.

The other kind, of which Bishop Taylor writes, we each want once: it is courage in face of certain death:

All men are resolved upon this, that to bear grief honestly and temperately, and to die willingly and nobly, is the duty of a good and of a valiant man: and they that are not so<sup>1</sup> are *vicious*, and *fools* and *cowards*. All men praise the valiant and honest; and that which the very heathen admired in their noblest examples, is especially *Patience* and *Contempt of Death*. *Zeno Eleates* endured torments rather than discover<sup>2</sup> his friends, or betray them to the danger of the Tyrant; and *Calanus* the barbarous and unlearned *Indian* willingly suffered himself to be burnt alive: and all the women did so, to do honour to their husbands' funeral, and to represent and prove their affections great to their lords. The religion of a Christian does more command fortitude than ever did any institution; for we are commanded to be willing to die for Christ, to die for the brethren, to die rather than to give offence or scandal; the effect of which is this, That he that is instructed to do the necessary part of his duty, is by the same instrument fortified against death: as he that does his duty need not fear death, so neither shall he; the parts of his duty are the parts of his security.

Thus did the English seventeenth century base the promise and possibility of courage upon the faithfulness of right conduct. Another great Englishman, whose early life overlapped Jeremy Taylor's, John Locke the philosopher, in one short, definite sentence told us what is the essence of the great virtue, courage, fortitude:

True Fortitude, I take to be the quiet Possession of a Man's self, and an undisturb'd doing his Duty, whatever Evil besets, or Danger lies in his Way.

We should have to go far to better that, either in matter or form.

John Donne, perhaps the greatest of all S. Paul's Deans, while he understands trouble at least as well as Jeremy Taylor, shed a bright hope over patient fortitude, which raises it above the level of sheer endurance:

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.*, who are not willing.

<sup>2</sup> Reveal their whereabouts.



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If some king of the earth have so large an extent of dominion in north and south, as that he hath winter and summer together in his dominions, so large an extent east and west as that he hath day and night together in his dominions, much more hath God mercy and judgement together; He brought light out of darkness, not out of a lesser light; He can bring summer out of winter though thou have no spring; though in the ways of fortune, or understanding, or conscience, thou have been benighted till now, wintred and frozen, clouded and eclipsed, damped and benumbed, smothered and stupefied till now, now God comes to thee, not as in the dawning of the day, not as in the bud of the spring, but as the sun at noon, to illustrate all shadows; as the sheaves in harvest, to fill all penuries; all occasions invite His mercies, and all times are His seasons.

There, without pompous phrases or out-of-the-way words, Donne, in the simplest language, with an extraordinary proportion of monosyllables even, conveys a succession of vivid pictures.

Izaak Walton, who besides being a great fisherman was also a writer, left us Biographies of five of his contemporaries, among them being Hooker and Donne. The following passage occurs in his introduction to his Life of Donne, and is a very fair instance of Walton's style and way of looking at life:

If I shall now be demanded, as once Pompey's poor bondman was (Plutarch), "the grateful wretch had been left alone on the sea-shore with the forsaken dead body of his once glorious lord and master; and was there gathering the scattered pieces of an old broken boat, to make a funeral pile to burn it; which was the custom of the Romans—Who art thou that alone hast the honour to bury the body of Pompey the Great?" So, who am I, that do thus officiously set the Author's memory on fire? I hope the question will prove to have in it more of wonder than disdain; but wonder indeed the reader may, that I, who profess myself artless, should presume with my faint light to shew forth his life, whose very name makes it illustrious! But, be this to the disadvantage of the person represented; certain I am, it is to the advantage of the beholder, who shall here see the Author's picture in a natural dress, which ought to beget faith in what is spoken: for he that wants skill to deceive, may safely be trusted.

And if the Author's glorious spirit, which now is in heaven, can have the leisure to look down and see me, the poorest, the meanest of all his friends, in the midst of his officious duty, confident I am, that he will not disdain this well-meant sacrifice to his memory:

for whilst his conversation made me and many others happy below, I know his humility and gentleness were then eminent; and I have heard divines say, those virtues that were but sparks upon earth, become great and glorious flames in heaven.

Thomas Hobbes' writings were political, using this adjective in its original sense of concerned with State affairs, and not in its modern one of partisanship. In any case it is not possible to give a good idea of his contribution to our prose by short extracts.

Sir Thomas Browne stands alone in our literature. Though his work is mainly religious or moral, he has also left behind a very entertaining treatise on *Vulgar Errors*. His style is peculiar to himself: in spite of his taste for words which he coined, at his need, from Greek and Latin, he succeeds in making his meaning clear. The solemn musical roll of his sentences, and their picturesqueness, due to his fertile if rather out-of-the-way powers of imagination, combined with his intensely human interest in the affairs of man's life, make him an author whom young people can love, and who does not wear thin or grow stale as years turn youth into age. This passage on self-mastery, from his *Christian Morals*, may appeal to any age, at any time or place; for, however we may wriggle, each one of us has to live and put up with our own self:

Be not a *Hercules furens*<sup>1</sup> abroad, and a Poltroon within thyself. To chase our Enemies out of the Field, and be led Captive by our Vices; to beat down our Foes, and fall down to our Concupiscences,<sup>2</sup> are Solecisms<sup>3</sup> in Moral Schools, and no Laurel attends them. To well manage our Affections and wild Horses<sup>4</sup> of Plato, are the highest

<sup>1</sup> Blusterer.

<sup>2</sup> Desires.

<sup>3</sup> Blunders.

<sup>4</sup> Plato pictured the human soul in the struggle we all have to make between right and wrong impulses—the struggle of which S. Paul writes in his Epistle to the Romans, ch. vii.—as two winged horses, a white and a black, yoked together in a pair and driven by a charioteer. The white horse “has dark eyes and is a lover of honour, modesty and temperance, and the follower of true glory.” The black horse “is a crooked lumbering animal, put together anyhow . . . the mate of insolence and pride, shag-eared and deaf, hardly yielding to whip and spur.” The Charioteer is Reason, who has seen the “vision of love.”

Circenses,<sup>1</sup> and the noblest Digladiation<sup>2</sup> in the Theatre of our selves: for therein, our inward Antagonists, not only like common Gladiators, with ordinary Weapons and down right Blows make at us, but also like Retiary<sup>3</sup> and Laqueary<sup>4</sup> Combatants, with Nets, Frauds and Entanglements fall upon us.

Weapons for such combats are not to be forged at Lipara: <sup>5</sup>Vulcan's Art doth nothing in this internal Militia; wherein not the Armour of Achilles, but the Armature of S. Paul gives the Glorious Day; and Triumphs not leading up into Capitols, but up into the highest Heavens. And therefore, while so many think it the only valour to command and master others, study thou the Dominion of thy self, and quiet thine own Commotions.

The following passage from the last great chapter of his *Urn-Burial* loses much by being taken from its context; yet even so, it shows Browne's vast sweep of thought, his mysterious picturesqueness:

Life is a pure flame, and we live by an invisible sun within us. A small fire sufficeth for life, great flames seemed too little after death, while men vainly affected precious pyres, and to burn like Sardanapalus; but the wisdom of funeral laws found the folly of prodigal blazes, and reduced undoing fires unto the rule of sober obsequies, wherein few could be so mean as not to provide wood, pitch, a mourner, and an urn.

The concluding lines of *Cyrus's Garden* are no less magnificent: indeed, these two chapters are generally considered the high-water mark of Browne's stately and curiously embroidered prose:

All things began in order, so shall they end, and so shall they begin again; according to the ordainer of order and mystical mathematicks of the city of heaven.

Though Somnus in Homer be sent to rouse up Agamemnon, I find no such effects in these drowsy approaches of sleep. To keep our eyes open longer, were but to act our Antipodes. The huntsmen are up in America, and they are already past their first sleep in Persia. But who can be drowsy at that hour which freed us from everlasting sleep? or have slumbering thoughts at that time, when sleep itself must end, and, as some conjecture, all shall awake again?

<sup>1</sup> Circus games.

<sup>2</sup> A sword fight.

<sup>3</sup> Using a net or <sup>4</sup> noose to catch one's enemy.

<sup>5</sup> An island where Vulcan had a forge.

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From these high and noble matters we turn to him in another vein, that of his *Vulgar Errors*. In his Third Book he discourses upon that pleasant insect, the glow-worm. His argument might have led to some idea forestalling the wild hopes of the South Sea Scheme and those contemporary speculations which deluded our eighteenth-century forbears. However that may be, his account shows not only his accuracy of observation, but his quiet fun at the expense of his over-hopeful fellow-creatures:

Wondrous things are promised from the Glow-worm; from thence perpetual lights are pretended, and Waters said to be distilled which afford a lustre in the night. . . . But hereto, we cannot with reason assent; for the light made by this animal depends much upon its life. For when they are dead they shine not, nor always while they live; but are obscure or light, according to the protrusion of their luminous parts, as observation will instruct us. For this flammeous light is not all over the body, but only visible on the inward side, in a small white part near the tail. When this is full and seemeth protruded, there ariseth a flame of a circular figure and emerald green colour, which is discernible in any dark place in the day; but when it falleth and seemeth contracted, the light disappeareth and the colour of the part only remaineth. Now this light, as it appeareth and disappeareth in their life, so doth it go quite out at their death; as we have observed in some, which preserved in fresh grass have lived and shined eighteen days: but as they declined, and the luminous humour dried, their light grew languid, and at last went out with their lives. . . . True it is, that a glow-worm will afford a faint light, almost a day's space, when many will conceive it dead; but this is a mistake in the compute of death, and term of disanimation; for indeed, it is not then dead, but if it be distended will slowly contract itself again, which when it cannot do, it ceaseth to shine any more.

Sir Thomas Browne is not only interesting because he is funny, and because he deals with such quaint popular ideas, for example, "that the ostrich digesteth iron," or "that peacocks are ashamed of their legs," or with "the antipathy between a toad and a spider," which latter he cheerfully rebuts by saying he has seen spiders sit on a toad's head, or walk all over him, "which at last, upon advantage, he swallowed down, and that in a few hours, to the number of seven"—no

one can call that antipathy; or, best perhaps of all, "that storks will only live in republics and free states." Besides all that he throws light upon a cultivated man's attitude, in the seventeenth century, to Natural Science. He does it all so cheerfully, not with Bacon's rather solemn learning, but rather with the practical sense of a medical man, brought constantly up against plain realities. He saw clearly the essential difference between speculation and matters of fact; and further, he realised that in questions of fact the great key is observation, and that extended, regulated kind of observation which is called experiment. Consequently, when he was told wonderful tales about animals (as he calls them) as easy to obtain as glow-worms, he just caught a few, and watched them and their doings, watched them carefully, too, as his remarks about their death show. When mere watching did not solve his puzzle, he tried experiment. For example, he had been told that a tiny reddish spider, called a taint, so small that "ten of the largest will hardly outweigh a grain," caused poisonous swelling and then the death of cattle and horses: country people, he said, declare that these animals have "licked the taint." Knowing the haphazard statements many people make, he wrote with sly amusement:

To satisfy the doubts of men, we have called this tradition unto experiment; we have given hereof unto dogs, chickens, calves and horses, and not in the singular number; yet never could find the least disturbance ensue.

Modern men may smile at some of his "scientific" conclusions; but they will acknowledge that his methods were sound.

By far the greater number of prose writers, in this century, were preoccupied with the graver matters of life and death, as the quotations in this chapter show. It was perfectly natural: the time was one of strife and confusion; men lost their lives, their fortunes, all they held dear, often with very little warning. Sir Thomas Browne was profoundly influenced by his time and its

sombre events; he wrote on weighty matters, as we have seen, at least as effectively as the rest. But there was another side to his genius. By its help he sometimes rose above the gloom and turmoil, and devoted himself to question, observation and experiment. The result was that in all his writings, whether he was considering eternity or an ant, there was in what he wrote a reality, a point, a liveliness, which must ever keep him, in spite of his long, difficult words, one of the most lovable of our English writers.

The century brought forth another man, who, though the affairs of life and death were as real, as important, to him as to his fellows, had a spirit of happiness, like an unquenchable spring hidden in his mind and soul, which makes him unique, not only in the seventeenth century, but in our literature.

He was not anything but a poor man; his life, in outward circumstances, was neither particularly fortunate nor successful. He was so little known that when his prose and poetry, after being lost for many years, were found in the last decade of last century, in unsigned manuscripts, on a second-hand bookstall in a street, even scholars were puzzled, and for a while supposed them to be Henry Vaughan's. But the prose was so obviously unlike his. Vaughan struggled bravely against the miseries of his day; but the writer of this newly found book passed them by in his joy at being alive in so incomparable a world as this; the world "as God has made it," not as man has marred it. After much toil, Mr. Dobell proved that both prose and poetry were written by Thomas Traherne. From his earliest years he possessed wonderful gifts enabling him to see and enjoy the beauties and glories of the natural world:

By the gift of God, they attended me into the world, and by His special favour I remember them till now. Verily they seem the greatest gifts His wisdom could bestow, for without them all other gifts had been dead and vain. They are unattainable by book, and therefore I will teach them by experience. . . . Certainly, Adam

in Paradise had not more sweet and curious apprehensions of the world than I when I was a child. . . .

The corn was orient and immortal wheat, which never should be reaped, nor was ever sown. I thought it had stood from everlasting to everlasting. The dust and stones of the street were as precious as gold; the gates were at first the end of the world. The green trees when I saw them first through one of the gates transported and ravished me, their sweetness and unusual beauty made my heart to leap, and almost mad with ecstasy, they were such strange and wonderful things. . . . Boys and girls tumbling in the street, and playing, were moving jewels. I knew not that they were born or should die. But all things abided eternally as they were in their proper places. Eternity was manifest in the Light of the Day and something infinite behind everything appeared; which talked with my expectation, and moved my desire. The city seemed to stand in Eden, or to be built in Heaven. The streets were mine, the temple was mine, the people were mine, their clothes and gold and silver were mine, as much as their sparkling eyes, fair skins and ruddy faces. The skies were mine and so were the sun and moon and stars, and all the world was mine, and I the only spectator and enjoyer of it. I knew no churlish proprieties,<sup>1</sup> nor bounds, nor divisions, but all proprieties and divisions were mine; all treasures and the possessors of them. So that with much ado I was corrupted, and made to learn the dirty devices of the world. Which now I unlearn, and become, as it were, a little child again that I may enter into the Kingdom of God.

Traherne's unsullied joy in nature is peculiar to him not in kind but in its intensity. Others have loved, but not in quite that passionate way. But his sense of *real* as distinguished from legal or material ownership has been shared by others. Vaughan, for example, under the title *The Importunate Fortune*, had written these beautiful lines:

I care not for your wondrous hat and purse,  
Make me a Fortunatus with thy curse.

\* \* \* \* \*

Why dost thou tempt me with thy dirty ore,  
And with thy riches make my soul so poor?

\* \* \* \* \*

Is it best  
To be confined to some dark, narrow chest,

---

<sup>1</sup> Properties.



And idolise thy stamps,<sup>1</sup> when I may be  
 Lord of all Nature and not slave to thee ?  
 The world's my palace. I'll contemplate there,  
 And make my progress into every sphere.  
 The chambers of the Air are mine; those three  
 Well furnished storeys my possession be.  
 I hold them all *in capite*,<sup>2</sup> and stand  
 Propt by my Fancy there.

The same idea is found in one of Mr. J. C. Squire's poems; he is still writing poetry:

You are my sky; beneath your encircling kindness  
 My meadows all take in the light and grow;  
     Laugh with the joy you've given,  
     The joy you've given,  
 And open in a thousand buds, and blow.

After the strife and passion of the seventeenth century, the eighteenth, which cared rather for the things of the head than of the heart, more for explanation and understanding than for admiration and pleasure, may strike us as dull and chilly. Its books were mainly concerned with the reasons of things; they dealt with the *ways* in which men think; the reasons why they should do this rather than that; with the best forms of government, with the soundest plans for increasing wealth and so forth. We will not choose quotations from any of these, but draw instead from the great critic of books and writers, Dr. Johnson, and from that statesman whose political speeches rose to the highest levels of oratory. In choosing from Dr. Johnson's writings, it seems suitable to take an extract from his account of Sir Thomas Browne, not only because he is still in our minds, but because the passage itself in its careful weighing of the man and his circumstances is a very fine model of literary criticism:

It is not on the praise of others, but on his own writings that he is to depend for the esteem of posterity; of which he will not be easily deprived, while learning shall have any reverence among

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.*, the devices stamped upon gold coins.

<sup>2</sup> In my own right.



men; for there is no science in which he does not discover some skill; and scarce any kind of knowledge, profane or sacred, abstruse or elegant, which he does not appear to have cultivated with success. His exuberance of knowledge and plenitude of ideas sometimes obstructs the tendency of his reasoning and the clearness of his decisions: on whatever subject he employed his mind, there started up immediately so many images before him, that he lost one by grasping another. His memory supplied him with so many illustrations, parallel or dependent notions, that he was always starting into collateral considerations: but the spirit and vigour of his pursuit always gives delight, and the reader follows him without reluctance thro' his mazes, in themselves flowery and pleasing, and ending at the point originally in view. . . .

He fell into an age in which our language began to lose the stability which it obtained in the time of Elizabeth; and was considered by every writer as a subject on which he might try his plastic skill, by moulding it according to his own fancy. Milton, in consequence of this encroaching licence, began to introduce the Latin idiom: and Browne, though he gave less disturbance to our structures and phraseology, yet poured in a multitude of exotic words. . . .

His style is indeed a tissue of many languages, a mixture of heterogeneous words, brought together from distant regions, with terms originally appropriated to one art, and drawn by violence into the service of another. He must, however, be confessed to have augmented our philosophical diction, and in defence of his uncommon words and expressions, we must consider that he had uncommon sentiments, and was not content to express in many words that idea for which any language could supply a single term.

Nowadays more people read than in Dr. Johnson's time, and they read a greater quantity. Nothing can be worse for anyone's mind than to read much and often without stopping to think and criticise. Criticism of what has been read is not only needed to push a person through some examination, or to help him to win credit for being "clever," but it is mentally essential. To let the words of a book or magazine trickle over what we call our minds, with no more attention to it than a duck seems to pay to pond-water running off its back, is to waste time, and take the edge off our understanding. This passage from Johnson may at first seem hard. He used long, if not such "exotic" words as Browne's. But anyone who takes the trouble to read it carefully

will see what sound sense it contains. Dr. Johnson gives Sir Thomas Browne all credit due to his knowledge and his use of it; he explains that his meandering and sometimes puzzling style is really the result of his desire to express everything that came tumbling into his mind. Then, lastly, he turns to the question of Browne's language, and having recalled the fact that English style itself was changing, and so left much freedom of choice to writers, he explains why the wise old doctor introduced so many foreign words. His sentences, like his thoughts, may be crowded and full of meaning, but he had no intention of filling his pages with a crowd of words, when by coining a new one from some other language he could say precisely what he had to say in one. Perhaps he had not fully realised how difficult it is to persuade some people to use a good dictionary, and to use it constantly.

Too often now, criticism is identified with finding fault. Johnson thought that a critic's main duty is to weigh and estimate, to unfold and to explain.

Edmund Burke was the great political orator of the eighteenth century. In his *Thoughts on the Present Discontents*, in which his object was, as he said, "to examine into the causes of public disorders," he discussed the Party System, arguing that if any good was to be done in public affairs, men who agreed on the means of doing that good must work together; that if they broke off from those who thought and felt with them, trying to work singly, they were only wasting time and force. He then, in the following simple but vigorous sentences, taught the way of living and working in a community such as our country is:

I remember an old scholastic aphorism<sup>1</sup> which says that "the man who lives wholly detached from others, must be either an angel or a devil." When I see in any of these detached gentlemen of our

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<sup>1</sup> *i.e.*, a maxim of the Scholastic Philosophy, the great system of thought built up by thinkers called the "Schoolmen" in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

times, the angelic purity, power and beneficence, I shall admit them to be angels. In the meantime we are born only to be men. We shall do enough if we form ourselves to be good ones. It is therefore our business to cultivate in our minds, to rear to the most perfect vigour and maturity, every sort of generous and honest feeling that belongs to our nature. To bring the dispositions that are lovely in private life into the service and conduct of the commonwealth; so to be patriots as not to forget we are gentlemen. To cultivate friendships and to incur enmities. To have both strong, but both selected; in the one to be placable, in the other immovable. To model our principles to our duties and our situations. To be fully persuaded that all virtue which is unpracticable is spurious; and rather to run the risk of falling into faults in a course which leads us to act with effect and energy, than to loiter out our days without blame and without use. Public life is a situation of power and energy: he trespasses against his duty who sleeps upon his watch, as well as he that goes over to the enemy.

By "enmities," Burke here means those which are political, not personal. He assumes that men will and must differ on public questions, and he says:

I find it impossible to conceive that anyone believes in his own politics, or thinks them to be of any weight, who refuses to adopt the means of having them reduced into practice.

One of the consequences of having definite principles like this is disagreement with those who do not share them; but it need not lead to personal enmity. One of the finest passages in Burke's works occurs in his pamphlet, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Whether or no people admire the results of the French Revolution, whether or no they share Burke's precise opinions and feelings concerning Marie Antoinette, no one with ordinary humanity or any sense for fine literature can deny the dignified splendour of Burke's eloquence:

History, who keeps a durable record of all our acts, and exercises her awful censure over the proceedings of all sorts of sovereigns, will not forget either those events or the era of this liberal refinement in the intercourse of mankind. History will record that on the morning of the sixth of October, 1789, the King and Queen of France after a day of confusion, alarm, dismay and slaughter, lay down under the pledged security of public faith to indulge nature in a few hours of

respite and troubled melancholy repose. From this sleep the Queen was first startled by the voice of the sentinel at her door, who cried out to her to save herself by flight—that this was the last proof of fidelity he could give—that they were upon him, and that he was dead. Instantly, he was cut down. A band of cruel ruffians and assassins reeking with his blood, rushed into the chamber of the Queen, and pierced with a hundred strokes of bayonets and poniards the bed, from whence this persecuted woman had but just had time to fly almost naked, and through ways unknown to the murderers had escaped to seek refuge at the feet of a king and husband, not secure of his own life for a moment. . . .

I hear, and rejoice to hear, that the great lady . . . has borne that day . . . and that she bears all the succeeding days, that she bears the imprisonment of her husband, and her own captivity, and the exile of her friends, and the insulting adulation of addresses, and the whole weight of her accumulated wrongs, with a serene patience, in a manner suited to her rank and race, and becoming the offspring of a sovereign distinguished for her piety and her courage; that like her she has lofty sentiments; that she feels with the dignity of a Roman matron, that in the last extremity she will save herself from the last disgrace, and that if she must fall, she will fall by no ignoble hand.

It is now sixteen or seventeen years since I saw the Queen of France, then the Dauphiness, at Versailles; and surely never lighted on this orb, which she hardly seemed to touch, a more delightful vision. I saw her just above the horizon, decorating and cheering the elevated sphere she just began to move in; glittering like the morning star, full of life and splendour and joy. Oh! what a revolution! and what an heart must I have, to contemplate without emotion that elevation and that fall! Little did I dream when she added titles of veneration to those of enthusiastic, distant, respectful love, that she should ever be obliged to carry the sharp antidote against disgrace concealed in that bosom; little did I dream that I should have lived to see such disasters fallen upon her in a nation of gallant men, in a nation of men of honour and of cavaliers. I thought ten thousand swords must have leapt from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult.— But the age of chivalry is gone. That of sophisters, economists and calculators has succeeded, and the glory of Europe is extinguished for ever. Never, never more shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom. The unbought grace of life, the cheap defence of nations, the nurse of manly sentiment and heroic enterprise is gone! It is gone, that sensibility of principle, that chastity of honour, which felt a stain like a wound, which inspired courage while it mitigated ferocity, which ennobled whatever it touched, and under which vice itself lost half its evil, by losing all its grossness.

It is impossible in a small space to give an idea which can in any way be adequate of the prose of the nineteenth century in England. Theology, Philosophy, Scientific Speculation, Criticism, Politics, Social Questions, Art, Industry—all these and more were its subject matter. We can but choose, with what skill we may, from the greatest or most characteristic writers. The first shall be Shelley, who, great poet as he was, showed, in his *Defence of Poetry*, the highest gifts of a maker of imaginative prose:

Poetry turns all things to loveliness; it exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful, and it adds beauty to that which is most deformed; it marries exultation and horror, grief and pleasure, eternity and change; it subdues to union, under its light yoke, all irreconcilable things. It transmutes all that it touches, and every form moving within the radiance of its presence is changed by wondrous sympathy to an incarnation of the spirit which it breathes; its secret alchemy turns to potable gold the poisonous waters which flow from death through life; it strips the veil of familiarity from the world, and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty which is the spirit of its forms.

As a rule it is impossible to choose, for such a book as this, suitable quotations to illustrate the place and value in our literature of our English novels. The following extract, indeed, will hardly do that; but Lord Beaconsfield, though some people still seem not to recognise his power as a novelist, incontestably possessed an opulent imagination and the power of drawing pictures, so that, according to our several capacities, we can see what he saw. *Tancred* is not generally considered his finest novel, but it has many beautiful passages, among which this description of Jerusalem by moonlight is not the least lovely:

The broad moon lingers on the summit of Mount Olivet, but its beam has long left the garden of Gethsemane, and the tomb of Absalom, the waters of Kedron, and the dark abyss of Jehoshaphat. Full falls its splendour, however, on the opposite city, vivid and defined in its silver blaze. A lofty wall, with turrets and towers and frequent gates, undulates with the unequal ground which it covers, as it encircles the lost capital of Jehovah. It is a City of

hills, far more famous than those of Rome; for all Europe has heard of Sion and Calvary, while the Arab and the Assyrian, and the tribes and nations beyond, are as ignorant of the Capitolian and Aventine mounts as they are of the Malvern or the Chiltern Hills.

The broad steep of Sion crowned with the tower of David; nearer still Mount Moriah, with the gorgeous temple of the God of Abraham, but built, alas! by the child of Hagar, and not by Sarah's chosen one; close to its cedars and its cypresses, its lofty spires and airy arches, the moonlight falls upon Bethesda's pool; farther on, entered by the gate of S. Stephen, the eye, though 'tis the noon of night, traces with ease the Street of Grief, a long winding ascent to a vast cupolaed pile that now covers Calvary; called the Street of Grief, because there the most illustrious of the human, as well as of the Hebrew race, the descendant of King David, and the divine son of the most favoured of women, twice sank under that burden of shame, which is now throughout all Christendom the emblem of triumph and honour. . . . Jerusalem by moonlight! . . .

The moon has sunk behind the Mount of Olives, and the stars in the darker sky shine doubly bright over the sacred city. The all-pervading stillness is broken by a breeze that seems to have travelled over the plain of Sharon from the sea. It wails among the tombs, and sighs among the cypress groves. The palm-tree trembles as it passes, as if it were a spirit of woe. Is it the breeze that has travelled over the plain of Sharon from the sea? Or is it the haunting voice of prophets mourning over the city they could not save? Their spirits surely would linger on the land where their Creator had deigned to dwell, and over whose impending fate Omnipotence had shed human tears.

This is not the futile "fine-writing" of some man who has nothing to say, but who, all the same, wishes to say it splendidly; there are no "purple patches." It is charged with reality, and rests upon a passion-filled past.

We may turn from this too-neglected novelist to one of the most distinguished "thinkers" of the Victorian age, John Stuart Mill. His thought and writings covered many regions of human ideas and actions; for clearness, expressiveness, variety of language and ingenuity in explanation he was probably not surpassed by any, and equalled by very few, of his contemporaries. As a rule, his subjects make extracts too difficult for a book like this. Yet, as some may think in an unlikely place, he once wrote a warning which we can all of us



appreciate, and which shows not a little of the charm of his style. He was observing that it is impossible to increase wealth unlimitedly; and that, in consequence, a time must come on this earth when there will be no room for more people, because they would have nothing to live on. The world, he argued, is of a fixed size, and its capacities for yielding life's necessities must have limits. We must remember that he died too soon to know of some scientific discoveries which seem to promise ways and means of increasing the earth's powers of production. How far such powers can be extended we do not know. But, writing on the facts of his own experience, he urged that there must come what he called a "stationary state." Then, reflecting on the fact that happiness does not depend upon multitudinous numbers, he wrote this praise of solitude:

A population may be too crowded, though all be amply supplied with food and raiment. It is not good for man to be kept perforce at all times in the presence of his species. A world from which solitude is extirpated, is a very poor ideal. Solitude, in the sense of being often alone, is essential to any depth of meditation or of character; and solitude in the presence of natural beauty and grandeur, is the cradle of thoughts and aspirations which are not only good for the individual, but which society could ill do without. Nor is there much satisfaction in contemplating the world with nothing left to the spontaneous activity of nature: with every rood of land brought into cultivation which is capable of growing food for human beings; every flowery waste or natural pasture ploughed up; all quadrupeds or birds which are not domesticated for man's use exterminated as his rivals for food, every hedgerow or superfluous tree rooted out, and scarcely a place left where a wild shrub or flower could grow without being eradicated as a weed in the name of improved agriculture.

People who call economics "the Dismal Science" would perhaps expect that such views and feelings should come not from a philosopher like Mill, but from some artist or art-critic. In spite of the ugly furniture, ornaments, wall-papers and other things in their houses, the Victorians cared supremely for some forms of beauty; for natural scenery, as Mill shows here; for magnificent

literature, and for art and architecture, as another great prose writer, John Ruskin, showed. He is one of those nineteenth-century writers who, having been perhaps over-praised in their life-time, are now too much slighted; some of us seem to be more like pendulums than creatures of balanced judgement; driving things too far in opposite directions.

Whatever people think now of the matters about which Ruskin wrote, his prose style cannot be dismissed as negligible. He was a very great stylist. I have chosen a passage from his *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, not only because it is a fine one, but because it deals with a matter which all can understand because it concerns us all, and which, nowadays, as much as if not more than ever, we need to consider well—viz., the question of honest and fine craftsmanship. Ruskin was writing about the ornamenting of Gothic architecture. But what he says has a very plain meaning for everyone who makes anything:

I believe the right question to ask respecting all ornament is simply this: Was it done with enjoyment—was the carver happy while he was about it? It may be the hardest work possible, and the harder because so much pleasure was taken in it, but it must have been happy too, or it will not be living. . . .

There is a Gothic Church lately built near Rouen, vile enough, indeed, in its general composition, but excessively rich in detail; many of the details are designed with taste, and all evidently by a man who has studied old work closely. But it is all as dead as leaves in December; there is not one tender touch, not one warm stroke, on the whole façade. The men who did it, hated it, and were glad when it was done. And so long as they do so, they are merely loading your walls with shapes of clay: the garlands of everlastings in Père la Chaise<sup>1</sup> are more cheerful ornaments. You cannot get the feeling for paying for it—money will not buy life. I am not sure even that you can get it by watching or waiting for it. . . .

But, at all events, one thing we have in our power—the doing without machine ornament and cast-iron work. All the stamped metals and artificial stones, and imitation woods and bronzes, over the invention of which we hear daily exultations, all the short and cheap and easy ways of doing that whose difficulty is its honour—

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<sup>1</sup> The great cemetery in Paris.



## ENGLISH LITERATURE

are just so many new obstacles, in our already encumbered road. They will not make one of us happier or wiser—they will extend neither the pride of judgement nor the privilege of enjoyment. They will only make us shallower in our understandings, colder in our hearts, and feebler in our wits. And most justly. For we are not sent into this world to do anything into which we cannot put our hearts. *We have certain work to do for our bread, and that is to be done strenuously; other work to do for our delight, and that is to be done heartily: neither is to be done by halves and shifts, but with a will: and what is not worth this effort is not to be done at all. Perhaps all that we have to do is meant for nothing more than an exercise of the heart and will, and is useless in itself: but, at all events, the little use it has may well be spared if it is not worth putting our hands and our strengths to. It does not become our immortality to take an ease inconsistent with its authority, nor to suffer any instruments with which it can dispense, to come between it and the thing it rules: and he who would form the creations of his own mind by any other instrument than his own hand, would also, if he might, give grinding-organs to Heaven's Angels, to make their music easier. There is dreaming enough, and earthiness enough, and sensuality enough in human existence, without our turning the few glowing moments of it into mechanism; but since our life must at the best be but a vapour that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away, let it at least appear as a cloud in the height of Heaven, not as the thick darkness that broods over the blast of the Furnace and rolling of the Wheel.*

The English nineteenth century counted many historians among its writers, not that they all wrote good prose, however great their historical gifts were. Possibly James Antony Froude's prose style was his strongest point, for his accuracy has often been challenged. In his *Short Studies on Great Subjects*, he wrote an account of an English sailor, Captain John Davis, who was murdered by Japanese pirates in the seventeenth century. In the middle of his story, he breaks away from history proper, into a reflection upon some lessons which may be learned from it, and particularly upon the use and value of suffering in human life:

Beautiful is old age,—beautiful as the slow-dropping mellow autumn of a rich, glorious summer. In the old man, Nature has fulfilled her work; she loads him with her blessings; she fills him with the fruits of a well-spent life; and surrounded by his children and his children's children, she rocks him slowly away to a grave, to which he is followed with blessings. God forbid we should not

call it beautiful. There is another life, hard, rough and thorny, trodden with bleeding feet and aching brow, the life of which the cross is the symbol, a battle which no peace follows this side of the grave; which the grave gapes to finish, before the victory is won; and—strange that it should be so—this is the highest life of man. Look back along the great names of history; there is none whose life has been other than this. They to whom it has been given to do the really highest work in this earth—whoever they are, Jew or Gentile, Pagan or Christian, warriors, legislators, philosophers, priests, poets, kings, slaves—one and all their fate has been the same—the same bitter cup has been given them to drink.

Froude's view may seem, on the surface, a gloomy one. But it simply, as he says, tells the story which History confirms that man can only triumph in life as a whole, and in life's great and small separate happenings by and through real self-sacrifice. Things of worth have their price. Something is not, cannot be, had for nothing. Someone has to make it, or dig for it, or go up to the heavens for it, or think it out; and the greater the prize the harder is the race. To some extent, at least, the simplest among us can see the reason. Which of us expects anything admirable from the sluggard? Which of us, in trouble, turns to the thoroughly selfish? However inaccurate in his details Froude may sometimes have been, he shows, in this passage, that he had read aright one main line in History's message to humanity. We are still too close to the last century to decide who was its greatest master of prose. I have tried, by choosing from a poet, a novelist, a philosopher, an artist, an historian, to show the great variety our prose literature exhibited. In the front rank of our writers, the great priest and scholar, John Henry Newman, must always be reckoned. There is, in his writing, a clearness, a light, a grace, and a kind of flexible strength which put him in a place apart. We will not take instances from his sermons, nor from his philosophy, but from his fine and too little known *Historical Sketches*. Some of his best writing is to be found in them; their comparatively simple matter makes them easy to be understood. The first is his description of a student, a "freshman" at

the great seat of learning, Athens, early in the fourth century before Christ. Here we learn what education was like more than two thousand years ago:

Our freshman . . . where is he to lodge? . . . Recollect, Athens was the home of the intellectual and beautiful; not of low mechanical contrivances and material organization. . . . I suppose you did not come to Athens to swarm up a ladder, or to grope about a closet: you came to see and to hear, what hear and see you could not elsewhere. . . . It was what the student gazed on, what he heard, what he caught by the magic of sympathy, not what he read, which was the education furnished by Athens.

He leaves his narrow lodging early in the morning; and not till night, if even then, will he return. It is but a crib or kennel—in which he sleeps when the weather is inclement or the ground damp; in no respect a home. And he goes out of doors not to read the day's newspaper, or to buy the gay shilling volume, but to imbibe the invisible atmosphere of genius, and to learn by heart the oral traditions of taste. Out he goes, and leaving the tumble-down town behind him, he mounts the Acropolis to the right, or he turns to the Areopagus on the left. . . .

Onwards he proceeds still; and now he has come to that still more celebrated Academe, which has bestowed its own name on Universities down to this day; and there he sees a sight which will be graven on his memory till he dies. Many are the beauties of the place, the groves and the statues, and the temple, and the stream of the Cephissus flowing by; many are the lessons which will be taught him day after day by teacher or by companion; but his eye is just now arrested by one object—it is the very presence of Plato. He does not hear a word that he says; he does not care to hear; he asks neither for discourse nor disputation: what he sees is a whole complete in itself, not to be increased by addition, and greater than anything else. It will be a point in the history of his life; a stay for his memory to rest upon, a burning thought in his heart, a bond of union with men of like mind, ever afterwards. Such is the spell which the living man exerts on his fellows, for good or for evil. . . .

A Spaniard is said to have travelled to Italy, simply to see Livy; he had his fill of gazing, and then went back again home. Had our young stranger got nothing by his voyage but the sight of the breathing and moving Plato, had he entered no lecture room to hear, no gymnasium to converse, he had got some measure of education, and something to tell of to his grandchildren.

But Plato is not the only sage, nor the sight of him the only lesson to be learned in this wonderful suburb. It is the region and the realm of philosophy. Colleges were the invention of many centuries later; and they imply a sort of cloistered life, or at least a life of rule, scarcely natural to an Athenian. It was the boast of the

philosophic statesman of Athens, that his countrymen achieved by the mere force of nature, and the love of the noble and the great, what other people aimed at by laborious discipline, and all who came among them were submitted to the same method of education. We have traced our student in his wanderings from the Acropolis to the Sacred Way; and now he is in the region of the schools. No awful arch, no window of many coloured lights marks the seats of learning there or elsewhere; philosophy lives out of doors. No close atmosphere oppresses the brain or inflames the eyelid; no long session stiffens the limbs. Epicurus is reclining in his garden; Zeno looks like a divinity in his porch; the restless Aristotle on the other side of the city, as if in antagonism to Plato, is walking his pupils off their legs in his Lyceum by the Ilissus.

Perhaps some of us who know schools in our great cities, so close to tram-lines and other heavy traffic that the windows cannot be freely opened if anything said in the class-rooms is to be heard; some of us who contemplate the bare, arid, smutty "playgrounds" which are the relief offered in "intervals" between the different lessons, or who observe those "open-air" schools, about which so much is said, though the composition of the said air is, wisely, not analysed, may wonder why we do not learn some practical as well as intellectual lessons from these Greeks, who found the ways of wisdom so many centuries ago.

This other passage from Newman deals with a very different subject; it is simpler, too, in style. He wrote of the great monastic Order, founded by S. Benedict of Nursia at Monte Cassino. About 530, he wrote his *Rule*, containing the principles on which the Order's life was to be carried out. It was largely inspired by the practice and writings of the Christian monks in Egypt, especially of S. Anthony and S. Pachomius, who lived in the third century, and of S. Basil, who drew up his Rule in the last half of the fourth. For nearly fourteen hundred years, the Benedictine Order has lived and worked. S. Benedict's main object was the holy, dedicated, ordered lives of men and women; but their influence has gone further than their own community, and has worked powerfully throughout the world. He

commanded them to worship God, to give themselves to prayer and meditation, to work with hand and brain, to perfect their own lives, and, as opportunity offered, to help others. Carrying out his injunctions, they have numbered in their great family not only multitudes of religious men and women, living by rule in the service of God, but they have founded and carried on great schools, teaching large numbers of boys and girls; they have produced scholars and authors; in some centuries, members of the Order became statesmen; they have built cathedrals and other great churches, and their architecture seems to symbolise, in its soaring grace, the indestructible spirituality and intellectual strength of the Order. When from the sixth to the twelfth centuries Europe was devastated by war, the Benedictines in the quiet of their libraries saved many of the greatest Latin and Greek classics. Besides all this, working for their own subsistence, they have practised and improved agriculture. No religious Order can have succeeded more completely in giving scope for a holy, useful life to the humblest and simplest, as well as to the most gifted and learned. It is not easy to make a convincing picture of such a community in a short space, but in the following passage Newman has given a most winning description:

We are told to be like little children: and where shall we find a more striking instance than is here afforded us of that union of simplicity and reverence, that clear perception of the unseen, yet recognition of the mysterious which is characteristic of the first years of human existence? To the monk, heaven was next door; he formed no plans, he had no cares; the ravens of his Father Benedict were ever at his side. He "went forth" in his youth, "to his work and to his labour," until the evening of life; if he lived a day longer, he did a day's work more; whether he lived many days or few, he laboured on to the end of them. He had no wish to see further in advance of his journey than where he was to make his next stage. He ploughed and sowed, he prayed, he meditated, he studied, he wrote, he taught, he died, and then he went to heaven. He made his way into the labyrinthine forest, and he cleared just so much of space as his dwelling required, suffering the high solemn trees and the deep pathless thicket to close him in. And when he began to

build, his architecture was suggested by the scene. . . . And when he would employ his mind, he turned to Scripture, the book of books, and there he found a special response to the peculiarities of his vocation. . . . Next, he read the Holy Fathers, and there again he recognised a like ungrudging profusion and careless wealth of precept and consolation. And when he began to compose, still he did so after that mode which nature and revelation had taught him, avoiding curious knowledge . . . writing not with the sharp logic of disputants, or the subtle analysis of philosophers, but, with the one aim of reflecting in his pages, as in a faithful mirror, the words and works of the Almighty.

In the later years of the Victorian period, one writer stood out from the rest as the maker of highly wrought, richly adorned prose, Walter Pater. He was a classical scholar, and besides, had varied knowledge of Gothic architecture, of modern European literature, and of Early Italian art. In this book, he shall be represented by two passages about things more familiar than those to most English readers. English indeed are these pictures of the homes of two boys. The first, from *The Child in the House*, is coloured probably by remembrance of his own childhood:

The *old house* . . . really was an old house, and an element of French descent in its inmates . . . might explain, together with other things, a noticeable trimness and comely whiteness about everything there—the curtains, the couches, the paint on the walls with which the light and shadow played so delicately; might explain also the tolerance of the great poplar in the garden, a tree most often despised by English people, but which French people love, having observed a certain fresh way its leaves have of dealing with the wind, making it sound in never so slight a stirring of the air, like running water.

The old-fashioned, low wainscoting went round the rooms, and up the staircase with carved balusters and shadowy angles, landing half-way up at a broad window, with a swallow's nest below the sill, and the blossoms of an old pear-tree, showing across it, in late April, against the blue, below which the perfumed juice of the find of fallen fruit in autumn was so fresh. At the next turning came the closet, which held in its deep shelves the best china. Little angel faces and reedy flutings stood out round the fireplace of the children's room. And on the top of the house, above the large attic, where the white mice ran in the twilight—an infinite, unexplored wonderland of childish treasures, glass beads, empty scent-bottles still sweet,



thrum of coloured silks among its lumber—a flat space of roof, railed round, gave a view of the neighbouring steeples; for the house, as I said, stood near a great city, which sent up heavenwards over the twisting weather-vanes not seldom its beds of rolling cloud and smoke, touched with storm or sunshine. . . .

So, the child of whom I am writing lived on there quietly; things without thus ministering to him, as he sat daily at the window with the bird-cage hanging below it, and his mother taught him to read, wondering at the ease with which he learned, and at the quickness of his memory. The perfume of the little flowers of the lime-tree fell through the air upon them like rain; while time seemed to move ever more slowly to the murmur of bees in it, till it almost stood still on June afternoons.

This needs no commendation to anyone who has loved home. It is, however, mainly a description of the house; another of Pater's sketches deals with gardens, in which some other children passed their time in the sweet homeland of Sussex:

How they shook their musk from them!—those gardens, among which the youngest son, but not the youngest child grew up. . . . The rippling note of the birds he distinguished so acutely seemed a part of this treeless place, open freely to sun and air, such as rose and carnation loved, in the midst of the old disafforested chase. Brothers and sisters, all alike were gardeners, methodically intimate with their flowers. You need words compact rather of perfume than of colour to describe them, in nice annual order; terms for perfume as immediate and definite as red, purple and yellow. Flowers there were which seemed to yield their sweetest in the faint sea-salt, when the loosening wind was strong from the south-west; some which found their way slowly towards the neighbourhood of the old oaks and beech-trees. Others consorted most freely with the wall-fruit, or seemed made for *pot-pourri* to sweeten the old black mahogany furniture. The sweat-pea stacks loved the broad path through the kitchen-garden; the old-fashioned garden azalea was the making of a nosegay, with its honey which clung to one's fingers. There were flowers all the sweeter for a battle with the rain; a flower like aromatic medicine; another like summer lingering into winter; it ripened as fruit does; and another was like August, his own birthday time, dropped into March.

The very mould here, rich old black gardener's earth, was flower seed; and beyond, the fields, one after another, through the white gates breaking the well-grown hedge-rows, were hardly less garden-like; little, velvety fields, little with the true sweet English littleness of our little island, our land of vignettes.

It is a long way from the beginnings of our prose far back in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* to this vivid, suggestive style of the nineteenth century. We pass from the very plain, unadorned origins, through the equally simple yet far more expressive and delicately cadenced prose of Rolle and his contemporaries—though none quite equalled him in style and force—on through the Romances and Chronicles, to the early Elizabethans, and then, in James's reign to that rendering of the Scriptures whose literary beauty a few faults of translation can nowise impair. We pass thence, through the majestic, poignant or witty prose of the greater seventeenth-century writers, and on to the satires and philosophy of the eighteenth, till finally, in the century we have just left, the volume of English prose swells into a great river, fed at countless points by inflowing streams. It is, to vary the image, like a vast treasure-house, left to us by our forbears. We may ransack its many chambers with whatever energy we have, but we cannot possibly exhaust its riches.

Perhaps this comparatively tiny gleaning from its passing centuries may show some of us that while it is idle to dispute as to whether poetry or prose is the greater—each having its own place and uses—it is more than foolish not to search our great writers till we find something, which is a consolation in drab days, and adds light to sunshine hours. We may not care for the same things as our neighbours; there is no particular reason why we should. But we must be fastidious indeed, or dull beyond belief, if in these wide pastures we can find no little pleasant patch for our own self.



## CHAPTER VII

### SONNETS

OF all forms of poetry, the lyric is perhaps the most natural and instinctive: it is easy to the majority of people to sing—somehow. From that, the step to singing in *measured* language seems to some a short one.

As a nation grows in culture, the “natural” lyric becomes more elaborate, and rules for its structure begin to be made; finally, lyrics split up into classes, those of sonnets and odes, for example. In the first chapter a lyric was described as a poem about a single thought, feeling or experience, as a song which comes from the heart, and which, while expressing the meaning of one person, appeals to many others.

Of all forms of lyric, the sonnet is the most carefully ordered; it is bound by definite, they might be called rigid, rules; it deals very briefly with one main thought. The lyric proper had flourished in England for many generations before the sonnet was introduced. The sonnet's origin and birthplace is not precisely known. Provence and Sicily have been suggested; the latter is generally thought to have begun the use of Italian, as distinguished from Latin, for literary purposes. The Emperor Frederick II ruled the two Sicilies, and tried, being himself a scholar, to propagate learning in the southern part of Italy. Besides the classics, he cared for the vernacular Italian and French which were beginning to replace Latin as the speech of everyday life. In his Sicilian Court, he gathered round him all the scholars and writers whom he could attract; and it

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seems to have been there that poetical forms and metres, proper to Italian thought and speech, were worked out.

If the beginnings of Italian poetry belong to the Sicilies, it was brought to perfection in Tuscany, and there, in the fourteenth century, the sonnet was developed. When Literature moved from Palermo to Florence, it gave up not only the House of Suabia for true Italians, but it changed Court life for that of "the People." Poetry was no longer the recreation of princes and courtiers who wrote poetry for each other, but it became the possession of the populace, who listened to and enjoyed the poetry which had sprung from their own midst.

During the thirteenth century, one or two individuals worked at the sonnet forms. Fra Guittone d'Arezzo (1230-1294) seems to have been the first to seize on and partially perfect the sonnet, which he used, as it should be, for the setting forth of a single thought or feeling. Dante, however, speaks of him as one of the poets whom other men praised without sufficient reason:

To rumour rather than to truth they turn their faces, and then do fix their opinions ere art or reason is listened to by them. So did many of our fathers with Guittone, shouting in turn and praising him alone.

It was Petrarca (1304-1374) who fixed the form of the typical Italian sonnet. Like Fra Guittone, he belonged to Arezzo in Tuscany. The main features of the sonnet, as he regulated it, are the fixed number of lines, fourteen; the "balance" of the poem, and the rime arrangement. The fourteen lines, of ten syllables each, are divided into the *Octave*, containing the first eight, and the *Sestet*, containing the last six. The octave should pause slightly at the end of the first quatrain, and more definitely at the close of the second. The Italian form only admitted two rime sounds in the octave; the first, fourth, fifth and eighth lines ended with one of these, the second, third, sixth and seventh with the other.

As the octave was equally divided into two quatrains, so was the sestet into two tercets. More license in riming is now allowed in the sestet; sometimes two, sometimes three rime sounds are permitted, and they are not always arranged in the same order. The typical Petrarchan sonnet allowed three sounds, riming the first and fourth lines, the second and fifth, the third and sixth.

During the fifteenth century, a few Englishmen travelled in Italy, the main attraction being the Revival of Learning, owing to the rediscovery of the classics. The revival began in Italy; Petrarca gave it a great impetus, and it was fostered by intellectually, if not always morally, enlightened princes, in the small Italian Courts, by the Republic of Florence, by scholars who escaped from Constantinople, and by great Italian scholars, like John of Ravenna, Peter Paul Vergerius, Luigi Marsigli, Gasparino da Barzizza, Poggio Bracciolini, Filelfo, Vittorino da Feltre, Æneas Sylvius Piccolomini (afterwards Pope Pius II) and others.

Among the first, if not the first Englishman to become aware of the New Learning in Italy was Richard de Bury, tutor of Edward III when the latter was Prince of Wales. De Bury was twice sent as English Ambassador to Pope John XXII; on his way he met Petrarca at Avignon. In 1345, he finished his *Philobiblion* (The Love of Books) in Latin. This was printed at Cologne in 1485. From the first sentence of his opening chapter we may learn an English scholar's view of wisdom:

The desirable treasure of wisdom and science, which all men desire by an instinct of nature, infinitely surpasses all the riches of the world; in respect of which precious stones are worthless; in comparison with which silver is as clay and pure gold is as a little sand; at whose splendour the sun and moon are dark to look upon; compared with whose marvellous sweetness honey and manna are bitter to the taste. . . . Where dost thou chiefly lie hidden, O most elect treasure! and where shall thirsting souls discover thee?

Certes thou hast placed thy tabernacle in books.

De Bury is something of an optimist in supposing that all men desire wisdom by an instinct of nature. It seems

difficult for some scholars to realise that wisdom is the very last thing many desire with what an economist calls "an effective demand," or, in other words, with willingness to pay its price.

Early in the fifteenth century (1415) Henry Beaufort attended the Council of Constance, and there he met the famous Italian scholar, Poggio. Twenty years later, Æneas Sylvius travelled through parts of England and Scotland, more or less incognito. He was not greatly impressed, and he thought the northerners specially barbarous. He kept a record of his travels, and among other odd bits of information, he solemnly stated that the men of Stroud (in Gloucestershire) were all born with tails.

Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, a serious student of Italian, obtained native teachers to help him with that and with Latin. He became a great collector of books, and on his death in 1447, left his library to the University of Oxford. John Tiptoft, Earl of Worcester, was another eager collector of books. He, too, travelled to Italy, and on to Palestine. On his way home, he stayed in Italy, listening to great scholars who were lecturing in Padua, Florence and Ferrara, the latter distinguished by the brilliant Court of the House of Este, famous patrons of learned men and women. Other English students who visited Italy were William Grey, John Free (Phreas), a poor scholar of Bristol whom Tiptoft probably helped with money. Free invited another Englishman, John Gunthorpe, to Ferrara. They were joined by a third, Robert Flemming, Dean of Lincoln. All this travelling opened up good relations between the two countries, and when Henry VIII came to the throne in 1509, admiration for Italian learning and literature was firmly established in England. However disappointingly bad Henry became in later years, we have to remember that at his accession, the scholars of his day—*e.g.*, Thomas More and Erasmus—were full of high expectations concerning him. When Henry was only nine years old, More took Erasmus to see the royal

children in their nursery; and the latter, writing to Prince Henry, closed his letter thus:

Farewell, and may Good Letters be illustrated<sup>1</sup> by your splendour, protected by your authority, and fostered by your liberality.

This growth of vernacular literatures in Europe is a matter of great importance. Throughout the Middle Ages, learned men of different nations spoke and wrote to each other in the common language of the learned, Latin. The supreme place of this language can be guessed from this fact: to-day if we are called on to judge dishonourable conduct, we sometimes dismiss it with the remark, "It was not cricket"; in the Middle Ages scholars expressed the same opinion by calling it "false Latin."

The first Englishmen who made literary use in England of the knowledge they had gained abroad were Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542) and the Earl of Surrey (c. 1517-1547), who, while they were in Italy, had learned to know and appreciate Petrarca's work. On their return to England they wrote many sonnets, which were eventually collected in a book called *Tottel's Miscellany*. Though they had been inspired by Petrarca, they disregarded his rime arrangement. In the following sonnet, written by Surrey, he has only two rime sounds, all through, both in octave and sestet:

The soote<sup>2</sup> season that bud and bloom forth brings,  
 With green hath clad the hill and eke the vale,  
 The nightingale with feathers new she sings;  
 The turtle<sup>3</sup> to her make<sup>4</sup> hath told her tale.  
 Summer is come, for every spray now springs;  
 The hart hath hung his old head on the pale;  
 The buck in brake his winter coat he flings;  
 The fishes flete with new-repaired scale;  
 The adder all her slough away she slings;  
 The swift swallow pursueth the flies smale;  
 The busy bee her honey now she mings;  
 Winter is worn that was the flowers' bale,  
 And thus I see among these pleasant things,  
 Each care decays, and yet my sorrow springs.

<sup>1</sup> Rendered more shining.

<sup>2</sup> Sweet.

<sup>3</sup> Dove.

<sup>4</sup> Mate.

It may seem at first as if this sonnet not only breaks the rules of form, but does not fulfil the important requirement of having one main thought. Yet, though the facts are rather "catalogued," the leading motive is that in the midst of the passing away of all wintry pains, the poet's sorrow is quite untouched by the joy of returning spring.

Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1556) more nearly used the true Italian form; but he, too, allowed himself license as to the placing of the rimes in the sestet; as a rule he rimed the ninth and eleventh, the tenth and twelfth, and the thirteenth and fourteenth. His sonnet, *To Sleep*, is a typical example of his matter and form:

Come, Sleep, O Sleep! the certain knot of peace,  
 The baiting-place of wit, the balm of woe,  
 The poor man's wealth, the prisoner's release,  
 The indifferent judge between the high and low;  
 With shield of proof shield me without the prease<sup>1</sup>  
 Of those fierce darts Despair at me doth throw.  
 O make in me those civil wars to cease,  
 I will good tribute pay if thou do so.  
 Take thou of me smooth pillows, sweetest bed,  
 A chamber deaf to noise or blind to light,  
 A rosy garland and a weary head:  
 And if these things as being thine by right,  
 Move not thy heavy grace, thou shalt in me  
 Livelier than elsewhere Stella's image see.

Though Sidney rimes as he will, he is careful about the pauses at the end of the quatrains; so far as form is concerned, this sonnet is an advance on Surrey's *To Spring*. The rimed couplet at the close of the sestet is a breach of Italian rules, but has become characteristic of the English sonnet form which is called Shakespearean. Surrey, Sidney and Spenser all practised this form, though of the three Spenser experimented most freely. His arrangement of rimes is his own; he rimes the first and third lines; the second, fourth, fifth and seventh; the sixth, eighth, ninth and eleventh, the tenth and twelfth; and then ends with a rimed couplet.

<sup>1</sup> Pressure.

His sixteenth sonnet, where he described the little archers of love, who lived in his lady's eyes, may serve as an example of his sonnet form, and not less of his sonnets' beauty of matter:

One day as I unwarily did gaze,  
On those fair eyes my love's immortal light:  
The whiles my 'stonished heart stood in amaze,  
Through sweet illusion of her look's delight;  
I mote perceive how in her glancing sight  
Legions of loves with little wings did fly,  
Darting their deadly arrows fiery bright,  
At every rash beholder passing by.  
One of those archers closely did I spy,  
Aiming his arrow at my very heart:  
When suddenly with twinkle of her eye,  
The Damsel broke his misintended Dart.  
Had she not so done, sure I had been slain,  
Yet, as it was, I hardly 'scaped with pain.

Sir Walter Raleigh (1552-1618) wrote one great sonnet on Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. His form is, no doubt, highly irregular: he does not divide his poem into octave and sestet; he admits no less than seven rime sounds, whereas Spenser was content with five, however far his arrangement of them might be from the typical Italian form. We always should remember that the whole Elizabethan age was one of adventure and experiment. This spirit spread to the literary men; they knew they had learned much, and that of great value, from Italy, but they did not allow themselves to forget that there is such a thing as national genius. However irregular Raleigh's sonnet may be, it has its place in our literature:

Methought I saw the grave where Laura lay,  
Within that temple where the vestal flame  
Was wont to burn; and passing by that way  
To see that buried dust of living fame,  
Whose tomb fair love and fairer virtue kept,  
All suddenly I saw the Faery Queene,  
At whose approach the soul of Petrarch wept;  
And from thenceforth those Graces were not seen,  
For they this Queen attended; in whose stead

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Oblivion laid him down on Laura's hearse.  
Hereat the hardest stones were seen to bleed,  
And groans of buried ghosts the heavens did pierce;  
When Homer's spright did tremble all for grief,  
And cursed the access of that celestial thief.

Samuel Daniel (1562-1619) and Michael Drayton (1563-1631) further developed the English or Shakespearean type of sonnet, using six and even seven rime sounds.

But it was left for Shakespeare to perfect this typical English form of sonnet. In his hands the octave and sestet divisions disappear; he uses three quatrains and a rimed couplet.

The problem, To whom did he address these sonnets?—has never been solved; they remain to show us that, quite apart from his dramatic genius, he had also lyrical genius, a rare sense of melody, a penetrating insight, and passionate emotions, qualities in which no other poet has surpassed him. In the whole range of English poetry, abundantly rich though it is in the expression of unquenchable love, can there be found lines more perfect, more passion-laden, more musical than these?—

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day ?  
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:  
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:  
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;  
And every fair from fair sometime declines,  
By chance or nature's changing course untrimmed;  
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,  
Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest;  
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,  
When in eternal lines to time thou growest:  
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,  
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Anyone can see that Shakespeare observes no sonnet rules save that he keeps to fourteen lines of ten syllables



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each: pauses, divisions, order of rimes are all disregarded; and the proper comment may be found in Henry V's reminder to Katherine of France:

O Kate, nice customs curtsey to great kings.

Therefore, Shakespeare moulded the English sonnet, or one form of it rather, as his genius led him. His sequence of one hundred and fifty-four poems has Love for its subject. In choosing from them, we will take him in an hour of confidence, in one of doubt, and close with his sonnet of immortal love. The twenty-fifth discloses him at a moment when he is sure that his love is returned:

Let those who are in favour with their stars  
Of public honour and proud titles boast,  
Whilst I, whom fortune of such triumphs bars,  
Unlook'd for joy in that I honour most.  
Great princes' favourites their fair leaves spread,  
But as the marigold at the sun's eye,  
And in themselves their pride lies buried,  
For at a frown they in their glory die.  
The painful warrior famous'd for fight,  
After a thousand victories once foil'd,  
Is from the book of honour raz'd quite,  
And all the rest forgot for which he toil'd.  
Then happy I, that love and am beloved,  
Where I may not remove nor be removed.

Then, in the ninety-first sonnet, he confessed to an hour of despondency and fear:

Some glory in their birth, some in their skill,  
Some in their wealth, some in their body's force;  
Some in their garments, though new-fangled ill;<sup>1</sup>  
Some in their hawks and hounds, some in their horse;

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<sup>1</sup> In Shakespeare's time many Englishmen borrowed ideas for clothes from foreign countries. In *Richard II* he spoke of

Report of fashions in proud Italy,  
Whose manners still our tardy, apish nation  
Limps after in base imitation.

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And every humour hath his adjunct pleasure,  
Wherein it finds a joy above the rest:  
But these particulars are not my measure;  
All these I better in one general best.  
Thy love is better than high birth to me,  
Richer than wealth, prouder than garments' cost,  
Of more delight than hawks or horses be;  
And having thee, of all men's pride I boast:  
    Wretched in this alone, that thou may'st take  
    All this away and me most wretched make.

Yet, beneath all accidents, proof against all temptations, invincible in all dangers, there remains that love which "many waters cannot quench"; and, rising above his individual confidence or distrust, Shakespeare, in his one hundred and sixteenth sonnet, wrote of love indestructible:

Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
Admit impediments. Love is not love  
Which alters when it alteration finds,  
Or bends with the remover to remove:  
Oh, no! it is an ever fixed mark,  
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;  
It is the star to every wandering bark,  
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.  
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks  
Within the bending sickle's compass come;  
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.  
    If this be error and upon me proved,  
    I never writ nor no man ever loved.

Milton, who was well acquainted with Italian literature, took pains, at times, to observe the Petrarchan arrangement of rimes; but he disregarded the rule of making a definite pause or break, in music and in thought, after the octave. Equally he discarded the Shakespearean form of three quatrains and a rimed couplet. His perhaps best-known sonnet, *On His Blindness*, is an excellent example of his form, called, after him, the Miltonic. It should be remembered that, believing it to be his duty to serve his country as Latin Secretary under the Commonwealth, he had not only

given up all leisure and energy for writing the poetry which he had planned as his life's work, but sacrificed his eyesight too:

When I consider how my light is spent  
Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,  
And that one talent which is death to hide  
Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent  
To serve therewith my Maker, and present  
My true account, lest He returning chide;  
"Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?"  
I fondly ask. But Patience, to prevent  
That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need  
Either man's work or His own gifts. Who best  
Bear His mild yoke, they serve Him best. His state  
Is kingly: thousands at His bidding speed,  
And post o'er land and ocean without rest,  
They also serve who only stand and wait."

In this sonnet, the rime-placing is correctly Petrarchan; but there is no pause whatever at the end of the first quatrain; also, at the close of the octave, it is essential to the sense of the words to run on the sound. Though there is no stop at "bent," a slight break in sound might be permissible, but any break after "prevent" makes nonsense.

In five only of his sixteen English sonnets does Milton observe this strict Petrarchan form; in most of the others he has but two rime sounds in the sestet.

It has often been urged that in the sphere of creative work, whether poetry, painting, sculpture, architecture or whatever it may be, no woman has yet reached the front rank. Among poetic forms, the sonnet stands apart, depending essentially on the wedding of beautiful thought and very delicate, highly wrought form. Here, surely, a woman might hope to succeed. Anyhow, there are critics who maintain that Mrs. Meynell's *Renouncement* is one of the greatest English sonnets. Dante Gabriel Rossetti declared it to be one of the three finest ever written by women. Leaving aside these questions of relative merit, which, after all, cannot be settled to everyone's satisfaction, it can be said without fear of

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contradiction that its workmanship is perfect, and its thoughts delicately true; the form is purely Petrarchan:

I must not think of thee; and, tired yet strong,  
I shun the thought that lurks in all delight—  
The thought of thee—and in the blue heaven's height,  
And in the sweetest passage of a song.  
Oh! just beyond the fairest thoughts that throng  
This breast, the thought of thee waits, hidden yet bright;  
But it must never, never come in sight;  
I must stop short of thee the whole day long.

But when sleep comes to close each difficult day,  
When night gives pause to the long watch I keep,  
And all my bonds I needs must loose apart,  
Must doff my will as raiment laid away,—  
With the first dream that comes with the first sleep  
I run, I run, I am gathered to thy heart.

Here we find the due pauses in sound and sense, the traditional rime-placing, and the climax of the closing line. It was published in Mrs. Meynell's *Preludes* in 1875.

Like Shakespeare, Milton had worked out a form of his own. In half his sonnets, the second, eighth, ninth, tenth, thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth, twentieth and twenty-first, he makes a definite pause at the end of the octave. But only in the second, *On His being arrived at the Age of Twenty-three*, in the fifteenth, *To General Fairfax*, and in the twenty-first, *To Cyriack Skinner*, does he definitely introduce that kind of new thought which makes the sestet a climax to the whole poem.

So far, we have arrived at three sonnet forms to be found in our literature. The first is the Petrarchan, with its carefully arranged rimes, a pause after the first quatrain, and its definite break in sound and sense at the octave's end. An excellent example in English is Milton's *To Cyriack Skinner*:

Cyriack, whose grandsire on the royal bench  
Of British Themis, with no mean applause,  
Pronounced, and in his volumes taught, our laws,  
Which others at their bar so often wrench;

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To-day deep thoughts resolve with me to drench  
In mirth that after no repenting draws;  
Let Euclid rest, and Archimedes pause,  
And what the Swede intend, and what the French.

To measure life learn thou betimes, and know  
Toward solid good what leads the nearest way;  
For other things mild Heaven a time ordains,  
And disapproves that care, though wise in show,  
That with superfluous burden loads the day,  
And, when God sends a cheerful hour, refrains.

Secondly, we have found the Shakespearean sonnet made up of three quatrains and a rimed couplet; and, thirdly, the Miltonic, which, as a rule, whether it preserves the Petrarchan rime order, or the Shakespearean freedom of rime, disregards the important rule of a break at the octave. The question arises, why should there ever have been insistence on this break, since two poets of the rank of Shakespeare and Milton disregarded it? Theodore Watts, a minor poet, but a penetrating critic of the nineteenth century, defended Petrarca's arrangement on the ground that it accords with Nature's laws; which, so far as we can observe, do not govern the world on a process of perpetual movement onward, or progress as some call it; but are always an ebb and flow, a gathering up which will break presently, an advance and a retreat. Meditating by the sea, with the sound of the forward-sweep and backwash of the tide in his ears, Mr. Watts wrote this sonnet on the sonnet, in which he discards precision of traditional rime, but carefully preserves the divisions of sound and sense, especially at the octave's close:

Yon silvery billows breaking on the beach  
Fall back in foam beneath the star-shine clear,  
The while my rhymes are murmuring in your ear,  
A restless love like that the billows teach;  
For on these sonnet-waves my soul would reach  
From its own depths, and rest within you, dear,  
As through the billowy voices yearning here  
Great nature strives to find a human speech.

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A sonnet is a wave of melody:  
From heaving waters of the impassioned soul  
A billow of tidal music one and whole  
Flows in the "Octave"; then returning free,  
Its ebbing surges in the sestet roll  
Back to the deeps of Life's tumultuous sea.

Thus, by an example, he showed the underlying reason of the traditional Italian form.

Wordsworth, in his *Sonnet on the Sonnet*, proclaimed its use and function, dealing not with its outward form, but with its contents and purpose:

Scorn not the Sonnet; Critic, you have frowned,  
Mindless of its just honours; with this key  
Shakespeare unlocked his heart; the melody  
Of this small lute gave ease to Petrarch's wound;  
A thousand times this pipe did Tasso sound;  
With it Camões soothed an exile's grief;  
The Sonnet glittered a gay myrtle leaf  
Amid the cypress with which Dante crowned  
His visionary brow: a glow-worm lamp,  
It cheered mild Spenser, called from Faeryland  
To struggle through dark ways; and when a damp  
Fell round the path of Milton, in his hand  
The Thing became a trumpet whence he blew  
Soul animating strains—alas, too few!

The eighteenth and nineteenth century sonneteers, like Wordsworth here, paid little attention to the Petrarchan rules. After all, each nation has its own genius, and is free to work out its poetical methods. Of all European races, perhaps Englishmen have least patience with inflexible rules. The result has been, in this matter of sonnet-making, a wide liberty, which has ended in fine achievement. Shakespeare's sonnets, Spenser's, some of Wordsworth's—such, for example, as *Westminster Bridge*:

Earth has not anything to show more fair;

or *Dover Beach*:

Inland, within a hollow oak, I stood;

or his call to Milton:

Milton ! thou should'st be living at this hour;  
England hath need of thee—

all these are unsurpassed as poetry.

There are other collections of English sonnets—for instance, Rossetti's *House of Life*, Mrs. Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt's *Love-Sonnets of Proteus*, and a few of Christina Rossetti's, which have become indestructible, inseparable parts of our literature. Here and there, an otherwise minor poet has won fame by a single great sonnet, as Blanco White did with *Night and Death*, which Coleridge considered "the finest and most grandly conceived sonnet in our language":

Mysterious Night ! when our first parent knew  
Thee from report divine, and heard thy name,  
Did he not tremble for this lovely frame,  
This glorious canopy of light and blue ?  
Yet 'neath a curtain of translucent dew,  
Bathed in the rays of the great setting flame,  
Hesperus with the host of Heaven came,  
And lo ! Creation widened in man's view.

Who could have thought such darkness lay concealed  
Within thy beams, ~~O Sun !~~ or who could find,  
Whilst flow'r and leaf and insect stood revealed,  
That to such countless orbs thou mad'st us blind !  
Why do we then shun Death with anxious strife ?  
If Light can thus deceive, wherefore not Life ?

Again, others, whose main work may have lain in other poetical forms, have written a few fine sonnets, like Keats and Matthew Arnold. William Watson, still living among us, has never received the general acceptance which, among his admirers, seems due to him. He is not in the first rank of poets: it might even be admitted that very often his thought is thinner than is suitable to the perfection of his workmanship. But he has written beautiful poetry, and, in an age constantly tending to slipshod, go-as-you-please fashions,

## SONNETS

he has never published crude, unfinished, unpolished verse. The more delicate poetic forms, such as the sonnet and the quatrain, naturally appealed to him. A large number of his sonnets were on political subjects about which a majority of his countrymen took the side opposite to his. But whatever men's politics, they should not let passion blind their poetic taste. It is difficult to know which to choose. In the *Armenian Collection*, the sonnet to Gladstone and *The Knell of Chivalry* are both true poetry. In an earlier volume there occurs the fine sonnet addressed to France, on the day after the assassination of President Carnot. Perhaps, as both concern matters still of burning moment, room may be made here for the first and the last. This is Watson's invocation to Gladstone, *The Tired Lion*, in retirement:

Speak once again, with that great note of thine,  
 Hero withdrawn from Senates and their sound  
 Unto thy home by Cambria's northern bound,  
 Speak once again, and wake a world supine.  
 Not always, not in all things, was it mine  
 To follow where thou ledst: but who hath found  
 Another man so shod with fire, so crowned  
 With thunder, and so armed with wrath divine?  
 Lift up thy voice once more! The nation's heart  
 Is cold as Anatolia's mountain snows.  
 Oh, from these alien paths of base repose  
 Call back thy England, ere thou too depart—  
 Ere, on some secret mission, thou too start  
 With silent footsteps, whither no man knows.

The other might seem strange to those who only knew of the comradeship of France and England during the Great War; yet that friendship was a late-born, and alas! somewhat tender plant, tenderer than those who love both countries like to think it:

Light-hearted heroine of tragic story!  
 Nation whom storm on storm of ruining fate  
 Unruined leaves,—nay, fairer, more elate,  
 Hungrier for action, more athirst for glory!



World-witching queen, from fiery floods and gory  
 Rising eternally regenerate,  
 Clothed with great deeds and crowned with dreams more great,  
 Spacious as Fancy's boundless territory;  
 Little thou lov'st our island, and perchance  
 Thou heed'st as little her reluctant praise;  
 Yet let her, in these dark and bodeful days,  
 Sinking old hatreds 'neath the sundering brine,  
 Immortal and indomitable France,  
 Marry her tears, her alien tears, to thine.

Once more, occasionally an author known principally as a novelist may write a strikingly beautiful sonnet, like this of Hall Caine:

Where lies the land to which thy soul would go?—  
 Beyond the wearied wold, the songless dell,  
 The purple grape and golden asphodel,  
 Beyond the zone where streams baptismal flow.  
 Where lies the land of which thy soul would know?—  
 There where the unvexed senses darkling dwell,  
 Where never haunting, hurrying footfall fell,  
 Where toil is not, nor builded hope laid low.  
 Rest! Rest! to thy hushed realm how one by one  
 Old Earth's tired ages steal away and weep  
 Forgotten or unknown, long duty done.  
 Ah God, when death in seeming peace shall steep  
 Life's loud turmoil, and Time his race hath run,  
 Shall heart of man at length find rest and sleep?

At the beginning of this chapter attention was drawn to the heavy debt which the Elizabethans owed to Italian literature, which itself rose out of the rediscovery in the thirteenth and following centuries of Greek and Roman classics.

No small factor in the spread of the "New Learning" in England was the re-founding, about the year 1512, of S. Paul's School, by the Dean, John Colet, friend of the sixteenth century's finest scholar, Erasmus, and of Sir Thomas More, saint, scholar and wit.

Laurence Binyon, on the occasion of the Fourth Centenary of that re-founding, wrote a sonnet which seems to close appropriately this short account of a form of poem which drew so much inspiration from the Italian Renaissance:

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When the long-clouded spirit of Europe drew  
Life from Greek springs, frost could no longer bind,  
And old truth shone like fresh dawn on the blind,  
Our Founder sowed his pregnant seed: he knew  
No crabbed rule; rather he chose a clue  
That should emband us of our historied kind  
Comrades, and keep us in a morning mind,  
Since to the wise Learning is always New.  
In Faith and Letters he enshrined his Light;  
Faith, the divine adventure that holds on  
Through this world's forest into worlds unknown,  
And Letters, that since speech on earth began  
As one unended sentence burning write  
The hope, the triumph, and the tears of Man.

The sonnet is not, as the lyric or ballad is, a form of spontaneous, impulsive song: it is at once the task and the joy of a craftsman. Probably, it will never be popular; but it will remain always dear to the artist. At its worst, it is worthless; at its best, it touches perfection.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE DRAMA

A DRAMA, or play, may be written in prose or poetry; it may handle the grave or the funny side of life, or the two intermingled.

In its beginning, so far back as men have traced, the drama was connected with religion. This was the case in England too.

Our plays probably began late in the eleventh century. Their main purpose, like that of the Cathedral sculptors, discussed in an earlier chapter, was to teach the great truths of the Christian religion to that multitudinous populace who had no books, and could not read them in any case. In the writing-schools of the monasteries, manuscripts, whether for the use of the Church or of learning, were laboriously copied manually by the monks. Obviously the circulation of books was therefore limited.

The "Miracle Plays" of the thirteenth century are believed to have developed out of "Liturgical *Tropes*," French in origin. These, at first, were an embellishment or elaboration of certain parts of the Mass, of the *Introit* (the "processional psalm" before it), of the *Gradual* or *Grail* (before the Gospel), of the *Kyrie*, of the *Gloria*. By the middle of the tenth century, these tropes were numerous, not only in France, but in England and Italy, and less frequently in Germany. By the thirteenth century they were falling into disuse, save that tropes to the *Kyrie* lasted in France to the sixteenth century. Their connexion with the drama arose out of their use at Christmas and Easter, when, leaving their original purpose, they grew into dramatic

scenes, acted by priests in the course of the Mass. From this use, the step to religious drama out of the Mass, for purposes of teaching, was a short and obvious one. The Calendar of the Church, with its perpetual greater and smaller Festivals, provided plenty of occasions and subjects. The great Feasts, Christmas, Easter, Ascensiontide, Whitsuntide and Corpus Christi, sufficed as days when the foundation truths of Christianity should be placed dramatically before those who could not read. Thus, they saw and heard the story of the Incarnation, of the Passion, Resurrection and Ascension, of the Feasts of the Holy Spirit and of the Blessed Sacrament. On the lesser Festivals, they saw acted and listened to the stories of the deeds and sufferings of their brethren, the great saints, doctors, martyrs, confessors of the days before their own. Besides all this, the human, most vivid and picturesque stories of Old Testament times afforded abundant material for teaching religion and right conduct.

At first, these plays were acted by the clergy; later, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the ordinary townspeople and workmen banded themselves together in Guilds, and acted themselves. The plays were given occasionally on stationary stages, generally on large carts, carrying a two-storied stage, which could travel about the country. Naturally, these people mixed up their own ideas, French, Italian, English, with the scenes, thoughts, and actions of the people of Palestine, whether before or after our Lord's time. When Shakespeare made his "mob" in *Coriolanus* or *Julius Cæsar*, or the Athenian workmen in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, just the English working people whom he knew so well, he was only following the customs of these early "Miracle Plays," and of the "Mysteries," as they were called, of the fifteenth century.

These plays developed earlier in France than in England. As we have found none earlier than 1066, it is very possible that we borrowed the idea from the Norman French, who settled down among us and said they had conquered us.

In England, the religious plays of the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries seem to have been called "Miracle" Plays. A very early one, on the life of S. Catherine of Alexandria, was performed at Dunstable at the beginning of the twelfth century. Four different sets of Miracle Plays have come down to us—the Towneley, the Chester, the Coventry, and the York. Of the first set, only one manuscript has been found, belonging to the Towneley family. These were performed at Wakefield; there are thirty of them. At York, the "pageant place," for the representation of the York Plays, of which there were forty-eight, was on the site of the present Great Northern Railway station. Next in number comes the Coventry Set with forty-two plays, while Chester had twenty-four. Most of these plays were given on the unwieldy-looking "house carts," carrying a platform on wheels, which bore a two-storied stage. Some of them were played, as a kind of monopoly, by definite sets of craftsmen, like the *Three Kings of Cologne*, which was in the hands of the plumbers, glaziers and goldsmiths of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. These craft-guilds competed keenly over the production of good dramatic work: as many guilds did in the work of Cathedral building and adornment. For instance, the glorious painted windows in the Cathedrals of Bourges, Chartres and Le Mans are, severally, gifts of a number of trade or craft guilds, among them being furriers, weavers, drapers, builders, tanners, etc. In York Minster one of the nave aisle windows is believed to have been given by a guild of bell-founders. These four Cathedrals—five if we add Canterbury—possess the finest mediæval glass in the world. We, in this later age, may wisely reflect on the happier conditions of the Middle Ages, when the tradespeople and craftsmen gave their gifts and their energy to the great arts of drama and glass-painting. Looking on at cinema shows and League matches seems but a dull substitute.

Our earliest English Miracle Play, *The Harrowing of Hell*, is one of the Towneley Set. Its subject is the

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tradition of our Lord's descent into Hell to rescue those souls who belonged to Him. The personages of this drama are: our Lord; Adam and Eve; the old prophets, Moses and Isaiah; the last of the prophets, S. John Baptist; King David and S. Simeon; with Ribald, Beelzebub and Satan.

In a conversation between Jesus Christ and Satan, the latter was unaware that our Lord was Incarnate God. At last, our Lord revealed this secret:

Thou wicked Fiend, let be thy noise;  
My Father dwells in Heaven on high,  
In bliss that nevermore shall cease;  
I am His only Son, His fore-word to fulfil,  
Together will we dwell or asunder when we will.

Satan's utter surprise, and immediate realisation that he can no longer make any defence, is expressed in four lines of quaint simplicity:

God's Son! nay, then might'st Thou be glad,  
Because no chattels need'st Thou crave:  
But Thou hast livèd always like a lad<sup>1</sup>  
In sorrow, and as a simple knave.<sup>2</sup>

In a play from the Chester Set, called *Abraham, Melchisedec and Isaac*, God the Father appeared as one of the characters, promising Abraham a son. The later dialogue between Abraham and Isaac, as they travel together to the Hill of Sacrifice, is most humanly real and pathetic. Again and again, as Isaac asks who is the victim, or, having learned, begs for mercy, Abraham cries:

Oh! my heart will break in three.

*The Harrowing of Hell* was an Easter play.

The Towneley (or Wakefield) *Shepherds' Play*, and the Coventry *Nativity Play*, of course, belonged to the Christmas Festival. The opening speech of the First Shepherd, in the *Shepherds' Play*, sounds more like the

<sup>1</sup> A human boy.

<sup>2</sup> Plain youth.

life on English downs and wolds than in Bethlehem's fields:

Lord ! what, these weathers are cold, and I am ill happed;  
I am near hand-numb, so long have I napped;  
My legs bend and fold, my fingers are chapped;  
It is not as I would, for I am all lapped  
In sorrow,  
In storms and tempest,  
Now in the east, now in the west.  
Woe is him has never rest  
Midday nor morrow.

In the Coventry *Nativity Play*, the shepherds, warned by the star, started for the Crib, and all together they said:

Brother, look up and behold,  
What thing is yonder that shineth so bright ?  
As long as ever I have watched my fold,  
Yet never saw I such a sight  
In field.

And then, as they actually approached the Crib, they sang this merry little Christian song:

As I rode out this enderes<sup>1</sup> night,  
Of the three jolly shepherds I saw a sight  
And all about their fold a star shone bright;  
They say Terli, terlow;  
So merrily the shepherds their pipes can blow.

Later on the Three Kings, Sir Jaspar, King of Taurus, Sir Balthasar, King of Araby, and Sir Melchior, King of Aginara, appeared, having at last seen the star for which they had so long watched. The third King prayed as they rode:

I ride wandering in ways wide,  
Over mountains and vales; I wot not where I am.  
Now King of all kings send me such guide  
That I may have knowledge of this country's name.

At last the Kings found the Crib, and kneeling, with their gifts, in turn addressed the Holy Child:

<sup>1</sup> Last past.

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*Jaspar :*

Hail, Lord, that all this world hath wrought !  
Hail God and man together in fere.<sup>1</sup>  
For Thou hast made all things of nought  
Albeit that Thou liest poorly here.  
A cup full of gold here I have Thee brought  
In tokening Thou art without peer.

*Balthasar :*

Hail be Thou, Lord of high magnificence,  
In tokening of priesthood, and dignity of office,  
To Thee I offer a cup full of incense,  
For it behoveth Thee to have such sacrifice.

*Melchior :*

Hail be Thou, Lord long looked for !  
I have brought Thee myrrh for mortality,  
In tokening Thou shalt mankind restore  
To life by the death upon the tree.

Neither human life nor literature stands still. As generations passed our national plays changed, developed. After a while historical persons were replaced by personified virtues and vices, such as Constancy, Good Deeds, Jealousy, Avarice, Courage, Gluttony and so forth. The Devil was retained in these " Morality " Plays; and the essential comic side of things was provided for by the invention of a character called " The Vice," whose special rôle it was to annoy the Devil. Long after, Shakespeare referred to this clown-like individual in *Twelfth Night*, when Feste, as Sir Topas, sang, as he left Malvolio's prison:

I am gone, sir,  
And anon, sir,  
I'll be with you again,  
In a trice,  
Like to the old Vice,  
Your need to sustain;  
Who, with dagger of lath,  
In his rage and his wrath,  
Cries, Ah ha ! to the devil:  
Like a mad lad,  
Pare thy nails, dad;  
Adieu, goodman devil.

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<sup>1</sup> In fellowship.



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Among other vexatious tricks, the Vice was accustomed to try to pare the Devil's claws with his wooden dagger.

The next dramatic change was easy: it was merely the substitution of men and women for these one-sided characters representing a single vice or virtue. Yet, these changes were spread over many generations, and the first English comedy, furnished with everyday men and women, was written by the Head Master of Eton College, Dr. Nicholas Udall, about 1550: it was called *Ralph Roister Doister*.

Within ten years, it was followed by the first English tragedy, *Gorboduc*, the joint production of Thomas Sackville, Lord Buckhurst and Thomas Norton; which Sir Philip Sidney described as "full of stately speeches, and well-sounding phrases, and as full of notable morality, which it doth most delightfully teach."

Out of the work of these many years, the Elizabethan Drama grew; the four great plays of Kit Marlowe—*Tamburlaine*, *Dr. Faustus*, *Edward II*, *The Jew of Malta*, written between 1587 and 1593; all the supreme tragedies, comedies, and histories of Shakespeare; the mighty tragic dramas of Webster; the plays of Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, and others. It is thought that Marlowe may have worked with Shakespeare, notably in *Henry VI*. But his fame rests upon his own four plays, and upon his lovely lyric, *Hero and Leander*. Marlowe's plays are not quite so easy to come by as Shakespeare's; so it is worth while to quote two speeches from these, our earliest, Elizabethan tragedies. The first comes from *Dr. Faustus*, the scholar who having sold his soul to the devil for the price of twenty-four years of life in which his every desire was satisfied, has come to eleven o'clock on the last night of the twenty-fourth year:

Ah Faustus,  
Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,  
And then thou must be damned perpetually!  
Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of Heaven,

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That time may cease, and midnight never come:  
Fair Nature's eye, rise, rise again and make  
Perpetual day; or let this hour be but  
A year, a month, a week, a natural day  
That Faustus may repent and save his soul.

\* \* \* \*

O I'll leap up to my God! Who pulls me down?  
See, see where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!  
One drop would save my soul—half a drop: ah, my Christ!  
Ah! rend not my heart for naming of my Christ!  
Yet I will call on Him . . .  
Mountain and hills come, come and fall on me,  
And hide me from the heavy wrath of God!

\* \* \* \*

Ah, half the hour is past! 'Twill all be past anon!  
O God!  
If Thou wilt not have mercy on my soul,  
Yet for Christ's sake, whose blood hath ransomed me,  
Impose some end on my incessant pain;  
Let Faustus live in hell a thousand years,  
A hundred thousand, and—at last—be saved!

\* \* \* \*

*(The clock strikes twelve.)*

O it strikes, it strikes! Now body, turn to air,  
Or Lucifer will bear thee quick to hell.  
O soul, be changed to little water drops  
And fall into the ocean—ne'er be found.  
My God! my God! look not so fierce on me!  
Adders and serpents, let me breathe awhile!  
Ugly hell, gape not! Come not, Lucifer!  
I'll burn my books!—Ah, Mephistophilis!

The other passage is from Edward II's speech, uttered just before he was done to death, by his wife's command, in Berkeley Castle, whence his body was carried for burial to Gloucester Cathedral. There, on his tomb to-day, men may see his effigy, portraying a handsome man, of kingly enough bearing, whatever his faults and shortcomings as a ruler may actually have been:

This dungeon where they keep me is the sink  
Wherein the filth of all the castle falls.  
And there in mire and puddle have I stood  
This ten days' space; and, lest that I should sleep,  
One plays continually upon a drum.

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They give me bread and water, being a king;  
So that for want of sleep and sustenance,  
My mind's distempered, and my body numbed,  
And whether I have limbs or no I know not.  
O, would my blood dropped out from every vein,  
As doth the water from my tattered robes.  
Tell Isabel, the queen, I looked not thus,  
When for her sake I ran at tilt in France,  
And there unhorsed the Duke of Claremont.

It is impossible in a book like this to say anything adequate about Shakespeare as a dramatist; but perhaps two instances of the use he made for his plays of *Chronicles* and other written history may be interesting. Moreover, it has a very important aspect, which is sometimes forgotten. Some years before Shakespeare had written any of his historical plays, Sir Philip Sidney, in his *Apologie for Poetrie* (1580-1581), had shown, as clearly perhaps as anyone can, the use which a dramatic poet can make of the philosopher's facts, thoughts, and dreams, and of the historian's account of the past. Sidney, looking with his mind's eye at the philosopher "comming towards me with a sullen gravity," and at the historian "laden with old Mouse-eaten records," declares that the former tries to succeed in teaching by "precept," and the second by "example." But, as Sidney realised, each only deals with half of the matter, while what men need if they are to learn to care and then to act is first to know how things should be done, which is the philosopher's business, and then to discover how they have been actually done, which is the historian's share. Who is to present these two parts at once? Sir Philip Sidney had no doubt on the point:

Now doth the peerless Poet perform both, for whatsoever the Philosopher saith should be done, he giveth a perfect picture of it in someone, by whom he supposeth it was done.

Two dissimilar instances of Shakespeare's method must suffice. Not improbably, some readers of *Richard II* have wondered why the king, hearing that

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his former servants, Bushy and Green, have gone over to the usurper Bolingbroke, should have exclaimed so bitterly—

O villains, vipers, damn'd without redemption !  
Dogs, easily won to fawn on any man !

since, as a rule, our pet animals are so singularly faithful and understanding. The explanation may be found in this passage from Froissart, the chronicler :

As it was informed me King Richard had a greyhound called Mathe, who always waited upon the king, and would know no man else. For whensoever the king did ride, he that kept the greyhound did let him loose, and he would straight run to the king and fawn upon him, and leap with his forefeet upon the king's shoulders. And as the king and the Earl of Derby talked together in the court, the greyhound, who was wont to leap upon the king, left the king, and came to the Earl of Derby, Duke of Lancaster, and made to him the same friendly countenance and cheer as he was wont to do to the king. The duke, who knew not the greyhound, demanded of the king what the greyhound would do. "Cousin," quoth the king, "it is a great good token to you, and an evil sign to me." "Sir, how know you that?" quoth the duke. "I know it well," quoth the king; "the greyhound maketh you cheer this day as King of England (as you shall be and I shall be deposed); the greyhound hath this knowledge naturally,<sup>1</sup> therefore, take him to you, he will follow you and forsake me." The duke understood well those words, and cherished the greyhound, who would never after follow King Richard, but followed the Duke of Lancaster.

So can the dramatic poet weave poignant tragedy out of philosophy and the chronicler's half-gossiping tale.

In some of the historical plays, Shakespeare's main authority is the *Chronicle* of Raphael Holinshed (?—1580). Not a little can be learned of his method of handling his materials by comparing the historian's account of Henry V's delay in starting for France with the great scene in *Henry V*.<sup>2</sup> The following passage is all which Shakespeare had before him :

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<sup>1</sup> *i.e.*, by his instinct.

<sup>2</sup> Act II, Sc. ii.

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When King Henry had fully furnished his navy, with men, munition and other provisions, he perceiving that his captains misliked nothing so much as delay, determined his soldiers to go ashipboard and away. But, see the hap! The night before the day appointed for their departure, he was credibly informed that Richard, Earl of Cambridge, brother to Edward, Duke of York, and Henry, Lord Scroope of Masham, lord treasurer, with Thomas Gray, a knight of Northumberland, being confederate together, had conspired his death; wherefore, he caused them to be apprehended.

The said Lord Scroope was in such favour with the king, that he admitted him sometime to be his bedfellow: in whose fidelity the king reposed such trust, that when any private or public counsel was in hand, this lord had much in the determination of it. For he represented so great gravity in his countenance, such modesty in behaviour, and such virtuous zeal to all godliness in his talk, that whatever he said was thought for the most part necessary to be done and followed. Also, the said Sir Thomas Gray (as some write) was of the king's privy council. Diverse write that Richard, Earl of Cambridge did not conspire with the Lord Scroope and Thomas Gray for the murdering of King Henry, to please the French king withal, but only with the intent to exalt to the crown his brother-in-law, Edmund, Earl of March, as heir to Lionel, Duke of Clarence: after the death of which Earl of March . . . the Earl of Cambridge was sure that the crown should come to him by his wife, and to his children of her begotten. And therefore (as was thought) he rather confessed himself for need of money to be corrupted by the French king, than he would declare his inward mind, and open his very intent and inward purpose, which, if it were espied, he saw plainly that the Earl of March should have tasted of the same cup as he had drunken, and what should have come to his own children he much doubted. Therefore, destitute of comfort, and in despair to save his children, he feigned that tale; desiring rather to save his succession than himself, which he did indeed: for his son Richard, Duke of York, not privily but openly claimed the crown, and Edward his son both claimed it and gained it, as after it shall appear.

These prisoners, upon their examination, confessed that for a great sum of money which they had received of the French king, they intended verily either to have delivered the king alive into the hands of his enemies, or else to have murdered him before he should arrive in the duchy of Normandy. When King Henry had heard all things opened which he desired to know, he caused all his nobility to come before his presence; before whom he caused to be brought the offenders also, and to them said: "Having thus *conspired* the death and destruction of me, which am the head of the realm and the governor of the people, it may be (no doubt) that you likewise have sworn the confusion of all that are here with me, and also the *desolation* of your own country. To what horror (O Lord!) for any true English heart to consider, that such an execrable iniquity should

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ever bewrap you, as for pleasing of a foreign enemy to imbrue your hands in your blood, and to ruin your own native soil. *Revenge* here in *touching my person*, though I *seek* not, yet for the safeguard of you, my dear friends, and for due preservation of all sorts, I am by office to cause example to be showed. *Get ye hence therefore, ye poor, miserable wretches*, to the receiving of your just reward; wherein *God's* majesty give you grace of *His* mercy and repentance of your heinous offences." And so, immediately they were had to execution.

It is easy to see how Shakespeare sometimes closely follows and sometimes entirely departs from this characteristic sixteenth-century plain description of facts. It should be read with the scene in *Henry V.* His chief departure from his original is in making the conspirators' offence a personal rather than a political one. He opens the scene with a conversation, not hinted at by Holinshed, between Exeter, Bedford and Westmorland. They all dwell on the personal treachery of the action. There is nowhere any suggestion resembling Holinshed's that the conspiracy was aimed at the kingdom as well as at the king. Again, Henry's skilful method of making the traitors judge themselves, a device not in Holinshed's story, shows Shakespeare's insight into human character. He follows the chronicler most closely in dwelling on the sheer treachery, the abominable betrayal, the kind of deed which no decent English man or woman, of any time or class, is ever inclined to condone. It is as if he wished to hold up to everlasting ignominy—as Dante had done before him—the misery and sin of skulking in the dark, of not daring to come out into the open, of stabbing your friend in the back. So he seizes on Holinshed's second paragraph, and out of it weaves the greatest apostrophe of condemnation to a traitor which perhaps exists in our language. That it is to be the core of his case, he shows, from the outset, in Exeter's speech:

Nay, but the man that was his bedfellow,  
Whom he hath dull'd and cloy'd with gracious favours,  
That he should, for a foreign purse, so sell  
His sovereign's life to death and treachery.

After Henry's adroit extraction of their guilt from their own lips, he deals with this dark sin of treachery:

But O

What shall I say to thee, Lord Scroope? thou cruel,  
 Ingrateful, savage and inhuman creature!  
 Thou that didst bear the key of all my counsels,  
 That knew'st the very bottom of my soul,  
 That almost might'st have coined me into gold,  
 Wouldst thou have practised on me for thy use,  
 May it be possible that foreign hire  
 Could out of thee extract one spark of evil  
 That might annoy my finger? 'Tis so strange,  
 That, though the truth of it stands off as gross  
 As black and white, my eye will scarcely see it.  
 Treason and murder ever kept together,  
 As two yoke-devils sworn to either's purpose,  
 Working so grossly in a natural cause  
 That admiration did not hoop at them.  
 But thou, 'gainst all proportion, didst bring in  
 Wonder to wait on treason and on murder:  
 And whatsoever cunning fiend it was  
 That wrought upon thee so preposterously  
 Hath got the voice in hell for excellence:  
 All other devils that suggest by treasons  
 Do botch and bungle up damnation  
 With patches, colours, and with forms being fetch'd  
 From glistening semblances of piety;  
 But he that temper'd thee bade thee stand up,  
 Gave thee no instance why thou should'st do treason  
 Unless to dub thee with the name of traitor.  
 If that same demon that hath gull'd thee thus  
 Should with his lion gait walk the whole world,  
 He might return to vasty Tartar back,  
 And tell the legions, "I can never win  
 A soul so easy as that Englishman's."  
 O, how hast thou with jealousy infected  
 The sweetness of affiance! Show men dutiful?  
 Why, so didst thou: Come they of noble family?  
 Why, so didst thou: seem they religious?  
 Why, so didst thou: or are they spare in diet,  
 Free from gross passion or of mirth or anger,  
 Constant in spirit, not swerving with the blood,  
 Garnish'd and deck'd in modest complement,  
 Not working with the eye without the ear,  
 And but in purgèd judgment trusting neither?  
 Such, and so finely bolted didst thou seem:



And thus thy fall hath left a kind of blot  
 To mark the full-fraught man and best indued  
 With some suspicion. I will weep for thee  
 For this revolt of thine, methinks, is like  
 Another fall of man.

It would not be easy to find a more illuminating instance of the use which drama can make of history. Shakespeare does not waste a word or a thought which appears in Holinshed; but as his sweeping poetry carries forward the torrent of his loathing for black ingratitude and treachery, he kindles the emotions of all who read or see; out of the chronicler's plain, accurate statement, he forges the red-hot scorn which burns up the creature who dares not face his foe, but does his cruel work secretly and unawares.

It is impossible here to give any adequate conception of the magnificence and variety of the Elizabethan drama, as it is generally called, though so much of it actually belongs to James's reign. One development of it, however, should not be entirely left out. It was Henry VIII who introduced the *Masque* into England from Italy. It was, at first, just a dumb show by players whose faces were concealed, hence the name. Later on, dialogue was introduced. The English masque's most flourishing time was James I's reign; his consort, Anne of Denmark, was particularly fond of them. Ben Jonson wrote a great number, of which *The Hue and Cry after Cupid* was performed at Court with special pomp and magnificence. In *The Masque of Blackness*, the queen and eleven of her ladies appeared as negresses. No expense was spared in producing these masques. The costly machinery and staging were superintended by the famous architect Inigo Jones. Alfonso Ferrabosco, the son of a former Court musician pensioned by Queen Elizabeth, who afterwards became musical tutor to James's son Henry, composed a great deal of the music. John Dowland, who had a "heavenly touch upon the lute," directed the songs, though, in spite of his skill, he failed to obtain that substantial



Court favour which he sought industriously. Thomas Giles and Jerome Herne arranged the dances. With all this varied talent showered upon them the Court *Masques* were splendid functions. Though Prince Charles played the leading part in Jonson's *The Vision of Delight*, he took very little pleasure in this form of play, and in his Court they were less popular than in his father's.

In 1625, the year of King James' death, Jonson himself was paralysed. However, he recovered partially, and in 1629, Charles, who had pensioned him, further commissioned him to write a new masque, *Love's Triumph*, which was performed on Twelfth Night, 1630. His last, *Chloridia*, was played at Court on Shrove Tuesday of 1630. Jonson, who by this time had lost his wife and children and was himself in a condition of sadly broken health, wrote but two more plays; declaring that his brain was not palsied, he was "only sick and sad." He died in 1637, and during the next few years the masque went out of fashion.

The Puritans, as everyone knows, objected to stage-plays. After the Restoration of Charles II, English drama borrowed considerably from France. Dryden wrote some romantic plays, for he was not only a great satirist. He wrote one fine tragedy, *All for Love*, and a comedy, *The Spanish Friar*. Comedy, in these days when men rejoiced in escaping from the grey decorum and dulness of the Puritans, grew popular; a gay "comedy of manners," depicting everyday fashionable life, copying its manners, and hitting off its follies. Wycherley, Congreve and Vanbrugh wrote the light-hearted, witty, but immoral plays which delighted the men and women of the Restoration.

Then the long, rather tedious reign of George III was charmed by the comedies of Oliver Goldsmith and Richard Brinsley Sheridan. These men had genius, penetrating insight into human character, lively and delightful wit. They did not spoil plays with the coarseness with which the Restoration playwrights had defaced

their work: and so, though in a different manner, the comedies of that Georgian era remain a thing apart, as the Elizabethan drama stands alone. Of course, the age was different from ours, for example: every succeeding generation has its own outlook, its own peculiar savour. But too many of us too often forget that there is a permanent foundation beneath the passing fashions of life; and that, in its deepest qualities, both tragic and comic, human nature changes little, and that very slowly. Consequently, Goldsmith's and Sheridan's comedies are as entrancing and convincing to us as to the men and women of the eighteenth century; we still delight in *The Good-natured Man*. *She Stoops to Conquer* is as fresh as when it was written, and Tony Lumpkin never passes from the land of true comedy and laughter. Sheridan's *Rivals* and *The School for Scandal* bear revival again and again: Mrs. Malaprop is a friend against whom death itself is powerless.

In the literature of the nineteenth century, with its wealth and astonishing variety, the drama has been the very weakest point, perhaps partly on account of the rise of the novel.

Shelley, in the early part of the century, wrote "lyrical dramas," like *Hellas* and *Prometheus Unbound*, but they were not meant for the actual stage. He produced one great tragedy, *The Cenci*, which has remained unacted until quite recently.

The plays of Tennyson were staged, but as they really never lived they can scarcely be said to have died: still they are printed among his Collected Works, and wisely, for they will always be searched from time to time by a few, for the sake of those lyrical passages which he could never wholly exclude from anything he wrote. His genius was essentially lyrical, not dramatic. Though Robert Browning could write fine lyrics, yet his attitude to human life was essentially dramatic. Oddly enough, his genius only once came to fruition, and that in a single scene of a play: the magnificent scene between Charles and the man he has betrayed, in *Strafford*, the

pathos of which is comparable to the famous deposition scene in *Richard II.* It would be hard to find human words more moving than Strafford's, betrayed, surrendered to his enemies by the king he had served, at the moment when the king, stung with remorseful shame, makes an ineffectual gesture to save him. Strafford just puts it aside:

Balfour, say nothing to the world of this !  
 I charge you, as a dying man, forget  
 You gazed upon this agony of one . . .  
 Of one . . . or if . . . why you may say, Balfour,  
 The king was sorry: 'tis no shame in him:  
 Yes, you may say he even wept, Balfour,  
 And that I walked the lighter to the block  
 Because of it. I shall walk lightly, sir !  
 Earth fades, heaven breaks on me; I shall stand next  
 Before God's throne; the moment's close at hand  
 When man the first, last time, has leave to lay  
 His whole heart bare before its Maker, leave  
 To clear up the long error of a life  
 And choose one happiness for evermore.  
 With all mortality about me, Charles,  
 The sudden wreck, the dregs of violent death—  
 What if despite the opening angel-song,  
 There penetrate one prayer for you ? Be saved  
 Through me ! Bear witness, no one could prevent  
 My death ! Lead on ! ere he awake—best, now !  
 All must be ready: did you say, Balfour,  
 The crowd began to murmur ? They'll be kept  
 Too late for sermon at St. Antholin's.  
 Now ! But tread softly—children are at play  
 In the next room. Precede ! I follow—

When Macready presented *Strafford* in London it ran but a few days. Browning seems to have expended his dramatic power best in that great poem in twelve books, as tragic as anything to be found in the world's literature, *The Ring and the Book*.

No staging could increase the awfulness of that picture of Guido, the treacherous murderer, coming at last, however men may or may not punish him, to his own proper state and place:

## THE DRAMA

Let us go away—leave Guido all alone  
 Back on the world again that knows him now !  
 I think he will be found (indulge so far !)  
 Not to die so much as slide out of life,  
 Push'd by the general horror and common hate  
 Low, lower,—left o' the very ledge of things,  
 I seem to see him catch convulsively  
 One by one at all honest forms of life,  
 At reason, order, decency and use—  
 To cramp him and get foothold by at least;  
 And still they disengage them from his clutch.

\* \* \* \* \*

And thus I see him slowly and surely edged  
 Off all the table-land whence life upsprings  
 Aspiring to be immortality,  
 As the snake, hatched on hill-top by mischance,  
 Despite his wriggling, slips, slides, slidders down  
 Hill-side, lies low and prostrate on the smooth  
 Level of the outer place, lapsed in the vale;  
 So I lose Guido in the loneliness,  
 Silence and dusk, till at the doleful end,  
 At the horizontal line, creation's verge,  
 From what just is to absolute nothingness—  
 Whom is it, straining onward still, he meets ?

\* \* \* \* \*

Judas, made monstrous by much solitude !  
 The two are at one now.

\* \* \* \* \*

Kiss him the kiss, Iscariot !

\* \* \* \* \*

There let them grapple, denizens o' the dark,  
 Foes or friends, but indissolubly bound,  
 In their one spot out of the ken of God  
 Or care of man, for ever and ever more.

Thus Browning in the nineteenth century treated the sin of treachery, as Shakespeare did in the sixteenth, or the great Florentine, Dante, in the thirteenth.

Again, he can squeeze tragedy into a line, like the last line in Guido's own speech; into five verses like *The Incident of the French Camp*; into some sixty lines like *Porphyria's Lover*. Or he will show the poignant drama of a soul torn bare of its covering by remorse

as in *Martin Relph*. Yet, apparently, his plays proper cannot be so staged as to hold an audience.

The nineteenth century had one success in drama, however, in the unique "light opera" of Gilbert and Sullivan. Their work, the *Mikado*, *Pinafore*, etc., is not usually regarded as a part of English literature. Yet, the musical genius of Sullivan wedded to the apt speech and barbed wit of Gilbert furnished operas which were and are loved by all and sundry, by simple and learned, and which repetition does not stale. These are no mean tests of literary worth. They are the work of fancy, of sense, of understanding of human nature, and of exquisite wit; which things are factors in literature. So if they are not worthy of the name, what shall they be called?

A multitude of "Plays" have been written and staged, of which a few comedies of manners deserve the name of Literature. Some will probably live.

The fate of Elroy Flecker's *Hassan*, published, at last, in November, 1922, awaits decision. Some of us fancy it is a work of genius; it has a terrible sombre awe which recalls the thundery terror of Webster in Elizabethan days, but this Oriental play is shot through with a keen white wit, playing and dancing over the darkness like lightning out of some piled-up storm cloud. It is full, too, of delicate poetry, and it may yet prove to be the one great tragedy (apart from Shelley's *Cenci*) which England has produced since her finest dramatic days in the reigns of Elizabeth and James.

## CHAPTER IX

### ESSAYS AND LETTERS

**A**N Essay is not a collection of words flung together anyhow about nothing in particular. Nor is it merely a difficult element in the process of passing an examination. Nor should it ever be just a method of that money-making which is legitimate enough when we boil together unpleasant substances to make soap or candles.

In its simplest essence, an essay is a composition according to flexible but orderly rules; something deliberately thought out duly said about some person, or thing, or idea which, to the writer, seems to be of interest and importance.

Strictly speaking, an essay should set forth the particular point to be discussed, should then deal with that point fully from various standpoints, and finally come to a just conclusion from the facts and arguments. It is a form of composition more naturally handled by the logical, lucid French mind than by us, who are more diffuse, more apt to stray into by-paths. Yet the great Montaigne was discursive enough, and our own Francis Bacon kept more to his main point, perhaps, than the Frenchman. Perhaps no Englishman has been so purely an essayist as Sainte-Beuve in the earlier part of the French nineteenth century; Macaulay, who played a somewhat similar part, was less bound by rules.

Among the chief English essayists, Francis Bacon, who popularised essays, will always have a conspicuous place. His first collected essays, few in number, appeared in 1597. When in 1625 he was dedicating the

third and much enlarged edition to the Duke of Buckingham, he wrote:

I do now publish my Essays, which, of all my works, have been most current, for that, as it seems, they come home to men's business and bosoms.

That is no formal definition; yet it seems to convey the main qualities of the true essay, its spirit of search (for "to essay" is to attempt something), its brevity, its completeness in a small compass, its friendliness.

His essay *Of Beauty* is perhaps not his finest, nor his best known, but it perhaps deserves less than some Dean Church's criticism:

He cast what he had to say into connected wholes. But nothing can be more loose than the structure of the Essays.

Moreover, it is short, and it deals with a single point:

Virtue is like a rich stone, best plain set; and surely virtue is best in a body that is comely, though not of delicate features, and that hath rather dignity of presence, than beauty of aspect. Neither is it almost seen that very beautiful persons are otherwise of great virtue as if nature were rather busy not to err, than in labour to produce excellency. And therefore, they prove accomplished, but not of great spirit; and study rather behaviour than virtue. But this holds not always; for Augustus Cæsar, Titus Vespasianus, Philip le Bel of France, Edward IV of England, Alcibiades of Athens, Ismael the Sophy of Persia, were all high and great spirits, and yet the most beautiful men of their times. In beauty, that of favour is more than that of colour, and that of decent and gracious motion more than that of favour. That is the best part of beauty which a picture cannot express, no, nor the first sight of the life. There is no excellent beauty, that hath not some strangeness in the proportion. A man cannot tell whether Apelles or Albert Dürer were the more trifier; whereof the one would make a personage by geometrical proportions, the other by taking the best parts out of divers faces to make one excellent. Such personages, I think, would please nobody but the painter who made them. Not but I think a painter may make a better face than ever was, but he must do it by a kind of felicity (as a musician that maketh an excellent air in music) and not by rule. A man shall see faces that, if you examine them part by part, you shall never find a good, and yet all together do well. If it be true that the principal part of beauty is in decent motion, certainly it is no marvel though persons in years seem many



## ESSAYS AND LETTERS

times more amiable: *Pulchrorum autumnus pulcher*. For no youth can be comely but by pardon, and considering the youth, as to make up the comeliness. Beauty is as summer fruits, which are easy to corrupt, and cannot last; and for the most part, it makes a dissolute youth, and an age a little out of countenance; but yet certainly again, if it light well, it maketh virtue shine, and vices blush.

The dramatist, Ben Jonson, possibly encouraged by Bacon's example, published in 1641 a slender collection of sayings, of which some amount to essays, described as *Discoveries made upon Men and Matters*, which he quaintly called *Timber*—"For just as we are commonly wont to call a vast number of trees growing indiscriminately 'a wood,' so also did the ancients call those of their books in which were collected at random articles upon various and diverse topics, 'woods' and 'timber-trees.' " People may object that "articles upon various and diverse topics" are not essays. Admittedly, many of them are but casual reflections. Among the longer pieces, these classical judgements on Shakespeare and Bacon, whom Ben Jonson obviously regarded as not one and the same person, may be fitly included here as essays, as attempts at expressing a single matter supremely well. The first has for title, *De Shakespeare Nostrati*:

I remember the players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakespeare, that in his writing (whatsoever he penned) he never blotted out a line. My answer hath been, "Would he had blotted a thousand," which they thought a malevolent speech. I had not told posterity this, but for their ignorance who chose that circumstance to commend their friend by wherein he most faulted; and to justify mine own candour, for I loved the man, and do honour his memory on this side idolatry as much as any. He was, indeed, honest, and of an open and free nature; had an excellent phantasy, brave notions, and gentle expressions, wherein he flowed with that facility that sometimes it was necessary he should be stopped. *Sufflammandus erat*,<sup>1</sup> as Augustus said of Haterius. His wit was in his own power; would the rule of it had been so, too! Many times he fell into those things, could not escape laughter, as when he said in the person of Cæsar, one speaking to him, "Cæsar, thou dost me wrong." He replied, "Cæsar did never wrong but with just cause";

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<sup>1</sup> He ought to have been clogged.



and such like, which were ridiculous. But he redeemed his vices with his virtues. There was ever more in him to be praised than to be pardoned.

That on Francis Bacon is called *Dominus Verulamius* :

One, though he be excellent and the chief, is not to be imitated alone; for never no imitator ever grew up to his author; likeness is always on this side truth. Yet there happened in my time one noble speaker who was full of gravity in his speaking; his language, where he could spare or pass by a jest, was nobly censorious. No man ever spoke more neatly, more presly,<sup>1</sup> more weightily, or suffered less emptiness, less idleness in what he uttered. No member of his speech but consisted of his own graces. His hearers could not cough, or look aside from him, without loss. He commanded where he spoke, and had his judges angry and pleased at his devotion. No man had their affections more in his power. The fear of every man that heard him was lest he should make an end.

The end of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries were the great age of the English essayists; it was then that philosophy and criticism had their short but shining reign. We could not now call John Locke's great book on the Human Understanding an essay; but it was so called on its appearance. Even his shorter, and more suggestive work, the *Conduct of the Understanding* exceeds the scope and length of a true essay: not so the writings of Abraham Cowley, John Dryden, Richard Steele and Joseph Addison, Samuel Johnson and Edmund Burke, whose genius made the English essay a great form of literary art.

The nineteenth century produced Coleridge, de Quincey, Hazlitt, and—the best known, most loved of them all—Charles Lamb. Macaulay filled the middle years. He was commonly called an essayist, but probably John Morley, who among his little monographs on great men wrote a few essays, was right in attributing to him “a true genius for narration,” rather than the detachment and critical spirit of a true writer of essays. “We may be sure,” says Morley, “that no author could have achieved Macaulay's boundless popularity among his contemporaries, unless his work had abounded in

<sup>1</sup> Concisely.

what is substantially commonplace." Undoubtedly, Macaulay's contemporaries hailed him as the great essayist of the day. Yet these strictures of John Morley, a critic of great insight and of justice as great, are serious weighty charges: and his final attack, when we remember that an essay is an attempt to estimate the real secret of a given matter, seems to indicate that Macaulay's countrymen were wrong; that they should have regarded him as a superb scene-painter. Morley writes of him:

He seeks Truth, not as she should be sought, devoutly, tentatively, and with the air of one touching the hem of a sacred garment, but clutching her by the hair of the head and dragging her after him in a kind of boisterous triumph, a prisoner of war and not a goddess.

Such a process may or may not be legitimate: but, at least, it is not the essayist's way.

In the closing years of the nineteenth century, the Essay became very popular; and the way which had been illumined by Matthew Arnold and Frederic Myers became even subtler and more intricate in the hands of Alice Meynell, that true poet, and Walter Pater, who loved all beauty with a deathless devotion.

Such work cannot be exhibited in extracts. The essay is, in some sort like the sonnet among poems, a thing by itself, with its own form and rules; therefore scraps are of no avail; essays should be studied whole.

Lamb's essays are, for the most part, too long for one to be included here; but apart from *Elia*, he wrote a series on *Popular Fallacies*. One of these, on that saying which must, at least in youth, have annoyed many of us—that *Enough is as good as a feast*—is not only a good instance of comprehensive handling in a very small space, but is also not at all a bad revelation of his peculiar tastes, wit and humour:

Not a man, woman or child, in ten miles round Guildhall, who really believes this saying. The inventor of it did not believe it himself. It was made in revenge by somebody who was disappointed of a regale. It is a vile cold-scrag-of-mutton sophism, a lie

faked upon the palate, which knows better things. If nothing else could be said for a feast, this is sufficient—that from the superflux there is usually something left for the next day. Morally interpreted, it belongs to a class of proverbs which have a tendency to make us undervalue *money*. Of this cast are those notable observations, that money is not health; riches cannot purchase everything; the metaphor which makes gold to be mere muck, with the morality which traces fine clothing to the sheep's back, and denounces pearl as the unwholesome excretion of an oyster. Hence, too, the phrase which imputes dirt to acres—a sophistry so barefaced, that even the literal sense of it is only true in a wet season. This and abundance of similar sage saws assuming to inculcate *content*, we verily believe to have been the invention of some cunning borrower, who had designs upon the purse of his wealthier neighbour, which he could only hope to carry by force of these verbal jugglings. Translate any one of these sayings, out of the artful metonymy which envelopes it, and the trick is apparent. Goodly legs and shoulders of mutton, exhilarating cordials, books, pictures, the opportunities of seeing foreign countries, independence, heart's ease, a man's own time to himself, are not *muck*—however we may be pleased to scandalise with that appellation the faithful metal that provides them for us.

Perhaps the only technical fault that can be found with this is that Lamb went off at a tangent, and forgot to return to the contrast between “enough” and a “feast.” He might reply to such a criticism that he had forestalled it by his declaration that the statement is not meant in its literal sense, but is a subterfuge; with which aspect of it he deals thoroughly.

Another form of composition was once literary: it seems to have few if any exponents now in this age of hurry and letter-cards; it is the *Letter*. We have, as we look through the past centuries, not a few delightful letter-writers: Milton, Gray, Walpole, Chesterfield and others. The most famous collection is that of the Paston family in the fifteenth century. These letters, dating from the Wars of the Roses, have preserved in the most satisfactory form—just because they were familiar letters, written to give news in the present, with no idea of being a research-quarry hundreds of years later—the military, social and family life of those troubled years.

As this present book has but one aim, to spread a love of beautiful and sound literature, perhaps the following letter, or part of a letter, which Milton the poet wrote to one of his many scholar friends, is the best for quotation here. He was writing to a Florentine friend, Benedetto Buonmattai, who had just ended the preparation of a Grammar of Tuscan, the purest of Italian dialects. Milton wrote thus:

I am glad to hear, my dear Buonmattai, that you are preparing new institutes of your native language, and have just brought the work to a conclusion. The way to fame which you have chosen is the same as that which some persons of the first genius have embraced; and your fellow-citizens seem ardently to expect that you will either illustrate or amplify, or at least polish and methodise, the labours of your predecessors. By such a work you will lay your countrymen under no common obligation, which they will be ungrateful if they do not acknowledge. For I hold him to deserve the highest praise who fixes the principles and forms the manners of a state, and makes the wisdom of his administration conspicuous both at home and abroad. But I assign the second place to him who endeavours by precepts and by rules to perpetuate that style and idiom of speech and composition which have flourished in the purest periods of the language, and who, as it were, throws up a trench around it, that people may be prevented from going beyond the boundary almost by the terrors of a Romulean prohibition. If we compare the benefits which each of these confers, we shall find that the former alone can render the intercourse of the citizens just and conscientious, but that the latter gives that gentility, that elegance, that refinement which are next to be desired. The one inspires lofty courage and intrepid ardour against the invasion of an enemy; the other exerts himself to annihilate that barbarism which commits more extensive ravages on the minds of men, which is the intestine enemy of genius and literature, by the taste which he inspires and the good authors which he causes to be read. Nor do I think it a matter of little moment whether the language of a people be vitiated or refined, whether the popular idiom be erroneous or correct. This consideration was more than once found salutary at Athens. It is the opinion of Plato that changes in the dress and habits of the citizens portend great commotions and changes in the state; and I am inclined to believe, that when the language in common use in any country becomes irregular and depraved, it is followed by their ruin or their degradation. For what do terms used without skill or meaning, which are at once corrupt and misapplied, denote, but a people listless, supine, or ripe for servitude? On the contrary, we have never heard of any people or state which has not flourished in

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some degree of prosperity as long as their language has retained its elegance and its purity. Hence, my Benedetto, you may be induced to proceed in executing a work so useful to your country, and may clearly see what an honourable and permanent claim you will have to the approbation and the gratitude of your fellow-citizens. . . .

Essays, letters, diaries are specialised forms of prose, which could not very well be included in the earlier chapter, called *The Treatise*. Neither could all remembrance of them be left out of a book, one of whose special purposes is to urge the variety of our Literature, and therefore the chance it offers to every one of us of finding something congenial, wedded as we so obstinately are, as a nation, each to our own individual tastes. The friendliness, the quality of coming home to men's business and bosoms, as Bacon said, inherent in these minor forms of literature, may perhaps win its way with a few who seem to be embarrassed or overwhelmed with the greater masterpieces.

## CHAPTER X

### ODES

LIKE the sonnet, the Ode is generally classed with lyrics. Yet, having, like the sonnet, a definite form, and in its perfection conforming to rules, it is entitled to a little corner apart.

The ode, whether in its simpler form called after the poet Horace (who lived in the first century B.C.) the *Horatian*, or in its most rigid form called after Pindar (who lived four centuries earlier) the *Pindaric*, is always a classical form of poem. The Pindaric ode has a threefold division, the strophe and antistrophe, which should be of precisely the same metre, and the epode.

The ode, as a poetic form, was recovered in the years of the Renaissance, but the rules governing it appear to have been very imperfectly understood. The Elizabethans, who borrowed so much from Renaissance Italy, were the first Englishmen who tried to write odes, and they contented themselves with the Horatian form; they produced, therefore, lyrical poems, stately and concentrated, dealing with a single thought which eventually they brought to a high and definite conclusion, like Spenser's great marriage hymn, the *Epithalamion*.

Ben Jonson wrote some odes, of which probably the best known is a call to himself to "leave the loathed stage," a thought suggested by the failure of one of his comedies. A follower of Jonson, Thomas Randolph, wrote a fine ode to Master Antony Strafford, of which the first three and the sixth verses will give an idea of the whole:

Come, spur away,  
 I have no patience for a longer stay,  
 But must go down,  
 And leave the chargeable noise of this great town;  
 I will the country see,  
 Where old simplicity,  
 Though hid in grey,  
 Doth look more gay  
 Than foppery in plush and scarlet clad.  
 Farewell, you city wits, that are  
 Almost at civil war;  
 'Tis time that I grow wise, when all the world grows mad

More of my days  
 I will not spend to gain an idiot's praise;  
 Or to make sport  
 For some slight puisne of the Inns-of-Court.  
 Then, worthy Strafford, say,  
 How shall we spend the day?  
 With what delights  
 Shorten the nights?  
 When from this tumult we are got secure,  
 Where mirth with all her freedom goes,  
 Yet shall no finger lose;  
 Where every word is thought, and every thought is pure.

Then from the tree  
 We'll cherries pluck, and pick the strawberry;  
 And every day  
 Go see the wholesome country girls make hay,  
 Whose brown hath lovelier grace  
 Than any painted face  
 That I do know  
 Hyde Park can show.  
 Where I had rather gain a kiss than meet  
 (Though some of them in greater state  
 Might court my love with plate)  
 The beauties of the Cheap and wives of Lombard Street.

\* \* \* \*

Ours is the sky,  
 Where at what fowl we please our hawk shall fly:  
 Nor will we spare  
 To hunt the crafty fox or timorous hare;  
 But let our hounds run loose  
 In any ground they'll choose;  
 The buck shall fall,  
 The stag, and all:

## ODES

Our pleasures must from their own warrants be,  
For to my muse, if not to me,  
I'm sure all game is free;  
Heaven, earth, are all but parts of her great royalty.

So rich is the realm of Poetry!

Andrew Marvell's ode on *Cromwell's Return from Ireland* is one of the best-known poems in our language. It is a tribute from a Royalist, and its greatness is shown by the fact that it never grows stale, not even these most often quoted lines:

And if we would speak true  
Much to the Man is due,  
Who, from his private gardens, where  
He lived reservèd and austere  
(As if his highest plot  
To plant the bergamot),  
Could by industrious valour climb  
To ruin the great work of time,  
And cast the kingdoms old  
Into another mould.  
Tho' Justice against Fate complain,  
And plead the ancient rights in vain—  
But those do hold or break,  
As men are strong or weak.  
Nature that hateth emptiness,  
Allows of penetration less,  
And therefore must make room  
Where greater spirits come.  
What field of all the civil war  
Where his were not the deepest scar?  
And Hampton shews what part  
He had of wiser art.  
Where, twining subtle fears with hope,  
He wove a net of such a scope  
That Charles himself might chase  
To Carisbrooke's narrow case.  
That thence the royal actor borne  
The tragic scaffold might adorn:  
While round the armèd bands  
Might clap their bloody hands;  
He nothing common did or mean  
Upon that memorable scene,  
But with his keener eye  
The axe's edge did try;



Nor called the Gods, with vulgar spite,  
To vindicate his helpless right;  
But bowed his comely head  
Down, as upon a bed.

Whether this poem deserves the name ode or not, may be a disputed point. No one can deny Marvell's insight into men and affairs. Milton, our great epic poet, who also compressed his powers into the sonnet's framework, wrote one great ode, that on *The Morning of Christ's Nativity*; his poems *On Time*, and *At a Solemn Music*, beautiful as they are, hardly conform to any model of odes.

In the middle of the seventeenth century the Horatian ode met a rival, in the form which, in old classical days, had preceded it by several centuries. Abraham Cowley, living in France as a Royalist refugee, discovered one book, which became his only literary companion, the *Odes of Pindar*. In spite of his close study of it, he somehow failed to grasp Pindar's real purpose. Nevertheless, he discarded the Horatian form, which till then had sufficed English poets, and produced a number of what he called *Pindaric Odes*. He could more or less reproduce the outward form, but the secret of Plato's "inspired man," escaped him. True he once began an ode with the line

Pindar is imitable by none,

but that truth conveyed to him less than might have been hoped. Dryden followed, and however little "Pindaric" his ode on *St. Cecilia's Day* may be, it is a great pæan in praise of harmony and music. William Congreve, the playwright, approached Pindar more nearly. His ode on *Mrs. Arabella Hunt Singing* is admittedly a great poem: the opening, middle and closing lines are extraordinarily beautiful:

Let all be hush'd, and softest motion cease,  
Be every loud tumultuous thought at peace,  
And every ruder gasp of breath  
Be calm as in the arms of death.

But hark ! the heavenly sphere turns round,  
 And silence now is drowned  
 In ecstasy of sound.  
 How on a sudden the still air is charm'd,  
 As if all harmony were just alarm'd.

\*       \*       \*       \*       \*

While we, charm'd with the lov'd excess,  
 Are wrapt in sweet forgetfulness  
 Of all, of all, but of the present happiness,  
 Wishing for ever in that state to lie,  
 For ever to be dying so, yet never die !

It was left for Thomas Gray, the poet whose lot was to write few poems, but those of strange perfection, to fashion odes on the true Pindaric model. This being so, to give extracts is to mangle them : consequently the *Progress of Poesy* shall be given intact, which involves the exclusion of his equally fine ode, *The Bard* :

I.—1.

Awake, Æolian lyre, awake,  
 And give to rapture all thy trembling strings.  
 From Helicon's harmonious springs  
 A thousand rills their mazy progress take.  
 The laughing flow'rs, that round them blow,  
 Drink life and fragrance as they flow.  
 Now the rich stream of music winds along,  
 Deep, majestic, smooth and strong,  
 Through verdant vales, and Ceres' golden reign;  
 Now rolling down the steep amain,  
 Headlong, impetuous, see it pour:  
 The rocks and nodding groves rebellow to the roar.

I.—2.

O sov'reign of the willing soul,  
 Parent of sweet and solemn-breathing airs,  
 Enchanting shell ! the sullen Cares  
 And frantic Passions hear thy soft control.  
 On Thracia's hills the Lord of War  
 Has curbed the fury of his car,  
 And dropped his thirsty lance at thy command.  
 Perching on the sceptred hand  
 Of Jove, thy magic lulls the feathered King  
 With ruffled plumes and flagging wing:  
 Quenched in dark clouds of slumber lie  
 The terror of his beak, and lightnings of his eye.

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### I.—3.

Thee, the voice, the dance, obey,  
Tempered to thy warbled lay.  
O'er Idalia's velvet green  
The rosy-crownèd Loves are seen.  
On Cytherea's day  
With antic Sports and blue-eyed Pleasures,  
Frisking light in frolic measures;  
Now pursuing, now retreating,  
Now in circling troops they meet;  
To brisk notes in cadence beating,  
Glance their many twinkling feet.  
Slow melting strains their Queen's approach declare;  
Where'er she turns, the Graces homage pay.  
With arms sublime, that float upon the air,  
In gliding state she wins her easy way;  
O'er her warm cheek, and rising bosom, move  
The bloom of young Desire and purple light of Love.

### II.—1.

Man's feeble race what ills await !  
Labour, and Penury, the racks of Pain,  
Disease and Sorrow's weeping train,  
And Death, sad refuge from the storms of Fate !  
The fond complaint, my song, disprove,  
And justify the laws of Jove.  
Say has he given in vain the heavenly Muse ?  
Night and all her sickly dews,  
Her spectres wan, and birds of boding cry,  
He gives to range the dreary sky;  
Till down the eastern cliffs afar,  
Hyperion's march they spy, and glitt'ring shafts of war.

### II.—2.

In climes beyond the solar road,  
Where shaggy forms o'er ice-built mountains roam,  
The Muse has broke the twilight gloom  
To cheer the shivering native's dull abode.  
And oft beneath the odorous shade  
Of Chili's boundless forests laid,  
She deigns to hear the savage youth repeat,  
In loose numbers wildly sweet,  
Their feather-cinctured chiefs and dusky loves.  
Her track, where'er the goddess roves,  
Glory pursue, and generous shame,  
The unconquerable Mind, and Freedom's holy flame,

## ODES

### II.—3.

Woods, that wave o'er Delphi's steep,  
Isles that crown the Ægean deep,  
Fields that cool Ilissus laves,  
Or where Mæander's amber waves  
In lingering labyrinths creep,  
How do your tuneful echoes languish,  
Mute but to the voice of anguish !  
Where each old poetic mountain  
Inspiration breathed around;  
Every shade and hallowed fountain  
Murmured deep a solemn sound;  
Till the sad Nine, in Greece's evil hour,  
Left their Parnassus for the Latian plains.  
Alike they scorn the pomp of Tyrant Power,  
And coward Vice, that revels in her chains.  
When Latium had her lofty spirit lost,  
They sought, O Albion ! next thy sea-encircled coast.

### III.—1.

Far from the sun and summer gale,  
In thy green lap was Nature's Darling laid,  
What time, where lucid Avon strayed,  
To him the mighty mother did unveil  
Her awful face: the dauntless child  
Stretched forth his little arms and smiled,  
" This pencil take " (she said) " whose colours clear  
Richly paint the vernal year;  
Thine too these golden keys, immortal Boy !  
This can unlock the gates of joy;  
Of horror that, and thrilling fears,  
Or ope the sacred source of sympathetic tears."

### III.—2.

Nor second He, that rode sublime  
Upon the seraph-wings of Ecstasy,  
The secrets of th' abyss to spy,  
He passed the flaming bounds of place and time:  
The living throne, the sapphire blaze,  
Where angels tremble, where they gaze,  
He saw; but blasted with excess of light,  
Closed his eyes in endless night.  
Behold, where Dryden's less presumptuous car  
Wide o'er the fields of glory bear  
Two coursers of ethereal race,  
With necks in thunder clothed, and long-resounding pace.

III.—3.

Hark, his hands the lyre explore !  
 Bright-eyed Fancy, hovering o'er,  
 Scatters from her pictured urn  
 Thoughts that breathe and words that burn.  
 But ah ! 'tis heard no more—  
 O lyre divine, what daring spirit  
 Wakes thee now ? Though he inherit  
 Nor the pride, nor ample pinion,  
 That the Theban eagle<sup>1</sup> bear,  
 Sailing with supreme dominion  
 Through the azure deep of air ;  
 Yet oft before his infant eyes would run  
 Such forms as glitter in the Muse's ray,  
 With orient hues unborrowed of the sun ;  
 Yet shall he mount and keep his distant way  
 Beyond the limits of a vulgar fate,  
 Beneath the Good how far—but far above the Great.

Though Gray's *Progress of Poesy* and *The Bard* are probably the most famous Pindaric odes in our language, some critics maintain that Akenside's are still nearer to the original model.

Collins returned to the more formless kind of ode, to which, in easy fashion, the general name of Horatian is given. Whatever it be called, his poem *To Evening* is singularly beautiful, lingering in memory with Gray's *Elegy* and Wordsworth's *Evening Voluntaries*.

William Watson, in one of his moments of apt insight, wrote delicately of the interval made by Gray and Collins in the dry "common sense" of the eighteenth century :

From dewy pastures, uplands sweet with thyme,  
 A virgin breeze freshened the jaded day.  
 It wafted Collins' lonely vesper-chime,  
 It breathed abroad the frugal note of Gray.

The "Romantic Poets" of the early part of the nineteenth century, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Campbell, Shelley, Keats, all wrote impassioned "sky aspiring" poems on a single subject, which might be, and have

<sup>1</sup> Pindar.

been, called odes, but little pretension to the old classical models survived. Byron once, in his long narrative poem, *Childe Harold*, slipped in five stanzas<sup>1</sup> which, considering the wide poetic license of the time, might quite well have stood alone, as an ode to Night.

Probably Keats is most truly "known" by his odes. For one who will read his long poem, *Endymion*, or even the shorter, *Hyperion*, several will return more than once to the odes, to *The Nightingale*, with its last four famous verses, to the *Grecian Urn* with its perfect, most exquisite second stanza. Perhaps his ode to *Autumn*, singularly beautiful in its vision, in its subtle colour, in its brevity, like the swiftly passing season of full maturity, is less well known than some:

## I.

Season of mist and mellow fruitfulness,  
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;  
Conspiring with him how to load and bless  
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;  
To bend with apples the mossed cottage-trees,  
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;  
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel-shells  
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,  
And still more, later flowers for the bees,  
Until they think warm days will never cease,  
For Summer has o'erbrimmed their clammy cells.

## II.

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?  
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find  
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,  
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;  
Or on a half-reaped furrow sound asleep,  
Drowsed with the fume of poppies, while thy hook  
Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers:  
And sometime like a gleaner thou dost keep  
Steady thy leaden head across a brook;  
Or by a cider-press, with patient look,  
Thou watchest the last oozy hours by hours.

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<sup>1</sup> Canto iii, stanzas 86-90.

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### III.

Where are the songs of Spring ? Ay, where are they ?  
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too—  
While barrèd clouds bloom the soft-dying day,  
And touch the stubble plains with rosy hue:  
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn  
Among the river salallows, borne aloft  
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;  
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;  
Hedge crickets sing; and now with treble soft  
The redbreast whistles from a garden croft;  
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

It is even more difficult to choose among Shelley's odes. *The Skylark*, *The Cloud*, *The West Wind*, and the ode to *Liberty* are all of poetry's finest tissue. It is perhaps rash to guess; yet it is possible that the Greeks themselves might have preferred the elusive lines which Shelley put into Pan's mouth:

### I.

From the forests and highlands  
We come, we come;  
From the river-girt islands,  
Where loud waves are dumb  
Listening to my sweet pipings.  
The wind in the reeds and the rushes,  
The bees on the bells of thyme,  
• The birds on the myrtle bushes,  
The cicale above in the lime,  
And the lizards below in the grass,  
Were as silent as ever old Tmolus was  
Listening to my sweet pipings.

### II.

Liquid Peneus was flowing,  
And all dark Tempe lay  
In Pelion's shadow, outgrowing  
The light of the dying day,  
Speeded by my sweet pipings.  
The Sileni, and Sylvans, and Fauns,  
And the Nymphs of the woods and waves,  
To the edge of the moist river-lawns,  
And the brink of the dewy caves,

## ODES

And all that did them attend and follow  
Were silent with love, as you now, Apollo,  
With envy of my sweet pipings.

### III.

I sang of the dancing-stars,  
I sang of the dædal Earth,  
And of Heaven—and the giant-wars,  
And Love, and Death, and Birth—  
And then I changed my pipings,—  
Singing how down the vale of Menalus,  
I pursued a maiden and clasped a reed:  
Gods and men we are all deluded thus!  
It breaks in our bosom and then we bleed:  
All wept, as I think both ye now would,  
If envy or age had not frozen your blood  
At the sorrow of my sweet pipings.

Tennyson, as Poet Laureate, was forced from time to time to write odes on public events. But he wrote one, in his capacity of pure poet, the following verses of which are some of the most beautiful lines to be found even among his early poems:

### I.

Thou who stealest fire,  
From the fountains of the past,  
To glorify the present; oh, haste,  
Visit my low desire!  
Strengthen me, enlighten me!  
I faint in this obscurity,  
Thou dewy dawn of memory.

### II.

Come not as thou camest of late,  
Flinging the gloom of yesternight  
On the white day; but rob'd in soften'd light  
Of orient state.  
Whilome thou camest with the morning mist,  
Even as a maid, whose stately brow  
The dew-impearled winds of dawn have kiss'd,  
When she, as thou,



Stays on her floating locks the lovely freight  
Of overflowing blooms, and earliest shoots  
Of orient green, giving safe pledge of fruits,  
Which in wintertide shall star  
The black earth with brilliance rare.

\* \* \* \* \*

IV.

Come forth, I charge thee, arise,  
Thou of the many tongues, the myriad eyes !  
Thou comest not with shows of flaunting vines  
Unto mine inner eye,  
Divinest Memory !  
Thou wert not nursed by the waterfall  
Which ever sounds and shines  
A pillar of white light upon the wall  
Of purple cliffs, aloof descried:  
Come from the woods that belt the gray hill-side,  
The seven elms, the poplars four,  
That stand beside my father's door,  
And chiefly from the brook that loves  
To purl o'er matted cress and ribbed sand,  
Or dimple in the dark of rushy coves,  
Drawing into his narrow earthen urn,  
In every elbow and turn,  
The filter'd tribute of the rude woodland.  
O ! hither lead thy feet !  
Pour round mine ears the live-long bleat  
Of the thick-fleeced sheep from wattled folds,  
Upon the ridged wolds,  
When the first matin-song hath waken'd loud  
Over the dark, dewy earth forlorn,  
What time the amber morn  
Forth gushes from beneath a low-hung cloud.

The great writers of odes in the latter part of the nineteenth century were Coventry Patmore and Francis Thompson. The latter's are long, and suffer grievous loss if cut. This chapter shall close, therefore, with perhaps the most characteristic of Patmore, in his unique series, *The Unknown Eros* :

It was not like your great and gracious ways !  
Do you, that have nought other to lament,  
Never, my Love, repent  
Of how, that July afternoon,  
You went,

With sudden, unintelligible phrase,  
 And frighten'd eye,  
 Upon your journey of so many days,  
 Without a single kiss, or a good-bye ?  
 I knew, indeed, that you were parting soon;  
 And so we sate, within the low sun's rays,  
 You whispering to me, for your voice was weak,  
 Your harrowing praise.  
 Well, it was well,  
 To hear you such things speak,  
 And I could tell  
 What made your eyes a glowing gloom of love,  
 As the warm south wind sombres a March grove.  
 And it was like your great and gracious ways  
 To turn your talk on daily things, my Dear,  
 Lifting the luminous, pathetic lash  
 To let the laughter flash,  
 Whilst I drew near,  
 Because you spoke so low that I could scarcely hear.  
 But all at once to leave me at the last,  
 More at the wonder than the loss aghast,  
 With huddled, unintelligible phrase,  
 And frighten'd eye,  
 And your journey of all days  
 With not one kiss, or a good-bye,  
 And the only loveless look, the look with which you pass'd,  
 'Twas all unlike your great and gracious ways.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to put Kit Smart's great poem, *A Song to David*, in any class; it is neither an ode nor a lyric. It is, beyond denial, one of the most remarkable and glorious poems in our literature, a "bright particular star" indeed, to have arisen in the late eighteenth century. Ostensibly addressed to King David, it is a hymn of ecstatic joy in all creation, in the physical and spiritual universes. Its love for all men and things, its adoring praise of the Holy Trinity, is not less burning than S. Francis', in his *Song of the Sun*, but its grasp and sweep are even vaster. Smart sings alike the praise of the Creator, of the "hoarding squirrel," of "rich almonds," of "the scholar bulfinch," of "western breezes": nothing is too great, nothing too small or obscure. It is pre-eminently a poem which cannot be cut without grievous damage. This one

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stanza, however, is a kind of epitome, a summing-up of the whole:

The pillars of the Lord are sev'n,  
Which stand from earth to topmost heav'n;  
His wisdom drew the plan;  
His WORD accomplish'd the design,  
From brightest gem to deepest mine,  
From CHRIST enthron'd to man.

## CHAPTER XI

### SATIRES

THE word *Satire* derives its meaning from the idea of fulness, of having had enough. The step from enough to too much is often a short one: when it is short, bitterness easily ensues, and then, if the particular talent be there, satire. As a poetical form it was probably invented by the Romans. The moods which offer it a congenial soil are mainly two. The first arises from a state of over-civilisation, when the cream of life is so thick that it becomes repulsive. The second, perhaps on the whole the healthier of the two, springs from an over-abundance of injuries and calamities. Such moods may be vented in mere satirical remarks, interpolations in more cheerful compositions. This kind of thing occurs early in all literatures. But the poem which is a satire all the way, which deliberately aims at exposing and lashing folly, vice, or both, generally speaking belongs to the later stages of a nation's life. Healthy joy, ordinary vexation are spontaneous impulses belonging alike to youth and every later age, whether of an individual or a race. But the calculated, thought-out, edged, cold thing we call satire is not naturally spontaneous in most of us: it is the issue of an overdose of something not in itself either pleasant or quite wholesome.

So in early days we find satirical passages in our literature, but not satires proper.

Such interspersed lines can be found in so mirthful a poet as Chaucer; but then Chaucer's nature had a grave, even a melancholy strand inwoven with the rest.

In *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, written by Langland

in the fourteenth century, satirical descriptions abound: sly attacks on every sort of humbug, hypocrite and pompous strutter, whom Piers saw in that

fair field full of folk.

He describes, and most bitingly too, "great lubbers," "loth to labour," who clothed themselves as friars, calling themselves hermits that they might exist lazily on other men's gifts; or faithless ecclesiastics, who left the care of Christ's flock for comfortable posts at Court, and so forth. But the poem is rather a picture of the very mixed life of the time, seen, it is true, by one whose troubles had exceeded his good fortune, than a true satire.

On the other hand, the short poem, *The Land of Cokaygne*, whose date is probably an early year of the fourteenth century, is a satire. It begins by contrasting Heaven and Cokaygne, greatly to the latter's advantage:

Far in the sea, west by Spain  
Is a land called Cokaygne.  
There is no land beneath Heaven's sway  
Like it in wealth and fine array,  
Though Paradise be merry and bright  
Cokaygne is of fairer sight.  
What, in Paradise, is there seen  
But grass, flowers, branches green?  
Though there be joy and delight  
There is no food saving fruit.  
There is no hall, chamber nor bench,  
Nought but water man's thirst to quench.  
No men are there save only two,  
Elijah and Enoch also.  
They may go sad and sore  
Where of men there dwell no more.

In Cokaygne is food and drink  
Without care, trouble or swink;<sup>1</sup>  
The food is choice, the drink is clear  
From morning hour until supper.

---

<sup>1</sup> Labour.

## SATIRES

I say forsooth without a doubt  
No land on earth is equal to it;  
No land is, under heaven, I wis,  
Of so manifold joy and bliss.

\* \* \* \*

There is no lack of food or cloth,  
There no man nor woman is wroth:  
There is no serpent, wolf nor fox,  
Horse nor nag, cow nor ox;  
There is no sheep, no swine, no goat  
Nor any filth, truly God it wot.

\* \* \* \*

There is no fly, flea nor louse  
In cloth, in barrel, bed nor house;  
There is no thunder, sleet nor hail,  
Nor any vile worm, nor any snail.

\* \* \* \*

But all is mirth, joy and glee,  
Well is him who there may be.

Then there follows a satirical picture of an abbey, sunk,  
as some had become, in utter luxury:

There is a most fair Abbey  
Of white monks and grey;  
There are bowers also halls,  
All of pasties are the walls,  
Of flesh, or fish, or rich meat  
The pleasantest that men can eat.  
Floury cakes are the shingles all  
On church, cloister, bower and hall.  
The pinnacles are fat puddings—  
Rich food for either princes or kings;  
Men can have thereof, and their fill,  
All quite rightly, no thought of ill.  
All is common for young and old,  
For stout or stern, for meek and bold.

And so the satire runs on for close on two hundred lines.

As controversy about religion increased, so did the tendency to satire grow; that, indeed, is a mild term for some of the pamphlets which were written in the seventeenth century; some of Milton's outbursts even being rather extreme for a scholar.

John Donne, Dean of S. Paul's, wrote some of the earliest English satires deliberately modelled on those of Latin authors. To us now, they have little living interest; but one or two quotations will serve to show his capacity in this particular vein of poetry. It is not, after all, as a satirist, but as a seer and lyricist, that men love Donne. In six lines, he thus gibbets the people who match their courtesy to other men's wealth:

O monstrous, superstitious puritan,  
Of refined manners, yet ceremonial man,  
That when thou meet'st one, with enquiring eyes  
Doth search, and like a needy broker prize  
The silk and gold he wears, and to that rate  
So high or low dost raise thy formal hat.

The following sarcasm is believed to be at the expense of Sir John Davies, some of whose poems Donne had, apparently, misunderstood:

But when he sells, or changes land, he impairs  
His writings, and unwatch'd, leaves out *ses heires*,  
As slyly as any commenter goes by  
Hard words, or sense; or, in divinity  
As controverters in vouch'd texts leave out  
Shrewd words, which might against them clear the doubt—

a stone with which he skilfully contrives to kill several birds at once. Then, in another satire, he looses an exceedingly bitter shaft against James I, who, on Elizabeth's death, brought a crowd of needy followers to the English Court, the King, himself, being indeed needy enough:

And princes must fear favourites worse than foes,  
For still beyond revenge ambition goes.  
How since her death<sup>1</sup> with sumpter-horse<sup>2</sup> that Scot  
Hath rid, who, at his coming up, had not  
A sumpter-dog.

Dryden in the seventeenth century, Pope and Swift in the eighteenth century, are the great English satirists; men who, in their varying degrees, showed the far-

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.*, Elizabeth's.

<sup>2</sup> Pack-horse.

reaching, terrible force of satire. Dryden, great as his satiric gift was, retained some kindliness. Pope with his neat, exquisite wit, his amazing power of touching a sore at its sorest, raised English satire to a level at which, in point and lucidity, even a Frenchman could scarcely beat him. Lastly came Swift, whose torrential wrath with men and things swept him into corrosive, cruel scorn.

Political strife was so exceedingly bitter in the closing years of Charles II's reign that Dryden declared, in his preface to his greatest satire, *Absalom and Achitophel*, that "he who draws his pen for one party must expect to make enemies of the other." He, after going over to the Royalist side, had been appointed Poet Laureate; according to the statement of Tonson, the publisher, it was at Charles' request that Dryden composed this damaging invective against the Earl of Shaftesbury, V who, at the moment of its publication, was undergoing his second term of imprisonment in the Tower, and was awaiting his trial on a charge of high treason.

In this preface Dryden pleaded that he was trying to win over the more moderate section of public opinion, "by rebating the satire, where justice would allow it, from carrying too sharp an edge." He added, "I have but laughed at some men's follies when I could have declaimed against their vices." He closed with the plea that "the true end of satire is the amendment of vices by correction." The following lines are the most telling in Dryden's portrait of Shaftesbury, "false Achitophel," as he labelled him:

For close designs and crooked counsels fit,  
Sagacious, bold and turbulent of wit,  
Restless, unfixed in principles and place,  
In power unpleased, impatient of disgrace;  
A fiery soul, which working out its way,  
Fretted the pigmy body to decay,  
And o'er-informed the tenement of clay.  
A daring pilot in extremity,  
Pleased with the danger, when the waves went high,  
He sought the storms; but, for a calm unfit,  
Would steer too nigh the sands to boast his wit.



Great wits are sure to madness near allied,  
And their partitions do their bounds divide;  
Else, why should he with wealth and honour blest,  
Refuse his age the needful hours of rest?  
Punish a body which he could not please,  
Bankrupt of life, yet prodigal of ease?  
And all to leave what with his toil he won  
To that unfeathered, two-legged thing—a son.

His portrait of George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham,  
pilloried as Zimri, is more murderous still:

A man so various that he seemed to be  
Not one but all mankind's epitome;  
Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong,  
Was everything by starts, but nothing long;  
But in the course of one revolving moon  
Was chymist, fiddler, statesman and buffoon.

\* \* \* \* \*

Railing and praising were his usual themes,  
And both, to show his judgment, in extremes:  
So over violent or over civil  
That every man with him was God or devil.  
In squandering wealth was his peculiar art;  
Nothing went unrewarded but desert.  
Beggared by fools whom still he found too late,  
He had his jest, and they had his estate.  
He laughed himself from Court; then sought relief  
By forming parties, but could ne'er be chief:  
For spite of him, the weight of business fell  
On Absalom and wise Achitophel;  
Thus wicked but in will, of means bereft,  
He left not faction, but of that was left.

Yet a little more scarifying still is his description of  
Slingsby Bethel (Shimei) who had been Sheriff of  
London, and was notorious for his mean ways:

Shimei whose youth did early promise bring  
Of zeal to God and hatred to his king,  
Did wisely from expensive sins refrain  
And never broke the Sabbath but for gain:  
Nor ever was he known an oath to vent  
Or curse, unless against the government.  
Thus heaping wealth by the most ready way  
Among the Jews, which was to cheat and pray.

## SATIRES

The City, to reward his pious hate  
Against his master, chose him magistrate.  
His hand a vase of justice did uphold,  
His neck was loaded with a chain of gold.  
During his office treason was no crime,  
The sons of Belial had a glorious time.

The literary men were hardly, if at all, less bitter in their enmities than the politicians. Shadwell and Dryden were, at one time, on friendly terms, but Shadwell, partly, it is true, from political motives, had attacked Dryden in an ill-tempered, scurrilous poem called *The Medal of John Bayes*. Dryden replied with *MacFlecknoe*. He selected as literary prince an inferior poet, recently dead, Flecknoe, and represented him as choosing, in his dotage, his successor—

pondering which of all his sons was fit  
To reign and wage immortal war with wit.

Flecknoe's choice fell upon Shadwell (*MacFlecknoe*), whose inheritance was thus proclaimed:

'Tis resolved, for Nature pleads that he  
Should only rule who most resembles me.  
Shadwell alone my perfect image bears,  
Mature in dulness from his tender years;  
Shadwell alone of all my sons is he  
Who stands confirmed in full stupidity,  
The rest to some faint meaning make pretence,  
But Shadwell never deviates into sense.  
Some beams of wit on other souls may fall,  
Strike through and make a lucid interval;  
But Shadwell's genuine night admits no ray,  
His rising fogs prevail upon the day.

Alexander Pope was England's premier poet in those unblest days when poetry had been degraded into a party weapon. He had written much which was free from political rancour and invective, but at last, in 1728, he yielded to the spirit of his age, and not less to his own ill-temper, and in *The Dunciad* he pitilessly criticised and tore into shreds the wretched scribblers and poetasters who surrounded him. At first Theobald, but

finally Colley Cibber, was raised to the royal throne of the Dunces. The picture of Dulness upon her throne gave Pope the chance he desired to whip and sting the minor poets, the ignorant scribblers, the money-grubbing nonentities whom he so heartily despised:

In clouded majesty here Dulness shone;  
Four guardian virtues, round, support her throne:  
Fierce champion Fortitude, that knows no fears  
Of hisses, blows, or want or loss of ears:  
Calm Temperance, whose blessings those partake  
Who hunger and who thirst for scribbling sake;  
Prudence, whose glass presents the approaching jail;  
Poetic Justice, with her lifted scale,  
Where, in nice balance, truth and gold she weighs,  
And solid pudding against empty praise.  
Here she beholds the chaos dark and deep,  
Where nameless somethings in their causes sleep,  
'Till genial Jacob, on a warm third day,  
Call forth each mass, a poem or a play;  
How hints, like spawn, scarce quick in embryo lie,  
How new-born nonsense is first taught to cry,  
Maggots half-formed in rhyme exactly meet,  
And learn to crawl upon poetic feet.

*The Dunciad* was written during Pope's most savage years. Yet once again, later, he used his pen mercilessly, not this time upon a worthless writer, but upon Addison himself. The following passage occurs in his *Prologue* to the *Satires*. In its polish, in its light and delicately poised language, in the rapier-like swiftness of its touch, it is an interesting contrast to the heavier, more ornate and resounding passage already quoted from *The Dunciad*:

Peace to all such ! but were there one whose fires  
True genius kindles, and fair fame inspires;  
Blest with each talent and each art to please  
And born to write, converse and live with ease:  
Should such a man, too fond to rule alone,  
Bear, like the Turk, no brother near the throne,  
View him with scornful, yet with jealous eyes,  
And hate for arts that caus'd himself to rise;  
Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer,  
And without sneering, teach the rest to sneer;

## SATIRES

Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike;  
 Just hint a fault, and hesitate dislike;  
 Alike reserv'd to blame, or to commend,  
 A tim'rous foe, and a suspicious friend;  
 Dreading ev'n fools, by flatterers besieged,  
 And so obliging, that he ne'er obliged.  
 Like Cato, give his little senate laws,  
 And sit attentive to his own applause;  
 While wits and Templars ev'ry sentence raise  
 And wonder with a foolish face of praise—  
 Who but must laugh, if such a man there be!  
 Who would not weep if Atticus were he!

This passage exhibits his personal hatred of Addison, who, after all, when these lines were published had been dead for eight years; it is evident, too, that Pope had polished his blade long and carefully, for every word wounds, and every stroke smarts.

Bitter and even unjust as Pope's satire could be, it pales beside the savage fury of which, at times, Jonathan Swift was capable. The two men were utterly unlike: while both had genius, Pope's was a small and Swift's a great nature.

The words on Swift's tablet in S. Patrick's Cathedral, in the epitaph which he composed—

UBI SÆVA INDIGNATIO  
 ULTERIUS COR LACERARE NEQUIT,<sup>1</sup>

are the key to his life's tragedy. There was in him, and he knew it, a tendency to insanity, and, as a matter of fact, he died insane after years of intense suffering. Moreover, he was of those in whom the world's iniquity, its cruelty, perverse inequality, injustice and greed rouse *sæva indignatio* (furious indignation): and such was his peculiar temperament that literally, as he said, it tore his heart. He was a man of tempestuous emotions, and meeting, again and again, the varied sins and follies of mankind, his wrath not seldom burst all

<sup>1</sup> Where furious indignation has no longer power to lacerate the heart.

bounds. There are no other satires in our language so tremendous, so comprehensive, so lacerating, so sure of their mark.

His essays on Ireland, the country in which he was born and died, though his family was of Yorkshire extraction, the Ireland which he hated, and yet pitied for its manifold miseries, are among his cruellest satires. None of these is more terrible than his *Modest Proposal* for preventing the children of poor people in Ireland from being a burden to their parents or country, and for making them beneficial to the public (1729).

There are some things which even in bitter jest are unbearable.

*Gulliver's Travels* are better known, and the fourth part of it was described by a critic as having "lacerated and defiled the whole body of humanity." Yet those who realise the rare passages of perfectly clean and perfectly legitimate satire even to be found here, where the savagery is sometimes brutal, may think that such a criticism is extravagant.

Swift in this fourth book represents himself as wrecked on a savage coast where noble beings, in the form of horses, *Houyhnhnms*, rule the state, and keep in subjection a disgusting race, whose outward form is approximately human, but whose thoughts and deeds are vile, a race called Yahoos.

The Gray Horse, or Houyhnhnm, whom he met, took pity on him; and Swift, in the person of a wrecked sea-captain, lived in this dignified creature's house, and gradually learned the Houyhnhnm language, and then learned of their life and ways. In conversation with the Gray Horse, Swift found an opportunity for some of his most searching satire on the people and manners of his own time. He described thus the Houyhnhnm notion of truth and falsehood:

He argued thus: "That the use of speech was to make us understand one another, and to receive information of facts; now, if any one said the thing which was not, these ends were defeated, because I cannot properly be said to understand him; and I am so far from

receiving information, that he leaves me worse than in ignorance; for I am led to believe a thing black when it is white; and short when it is long." And these were all the notions he had concerning that faculty of lying, so perfectly well understood, and so universally practised among human creatures.

Still more to the point was his satire on the philosophers of his day. The eighteenth century prided itself on its reasonableness, on its intellectual force, and on its superior wisdom. So Swift turned round on them all, and, with irrefutable wit, set forth the Houyhnhnm view of reason:

As these noble Houyhnhnms are endowed by nature with a general disposition to all virtues, and have no conceptions or ideas of what is evil in a rational creature, so their grand maxim is to cultivate reason, and to be wholly governed by it. Neither is reason among them a point problematical as with us, where men can argue with plausibility on both sides of the question, but strikes you with immediate conviction, as it must needs do, where it is not mingled, obscured or discoloured by passion and interest. I remember that it was with extreme difficulty that I could bring my Master to understand the meaning of the word *opinion*, or how a point could be disputable; because reason taught us to affirm or deny only where we are certain; and beyond our knowledge we cannot do either: so that controversies, wranglings, disputes and positiveness in false or dubious propositions, are evils unknown among the Houyhnhnms. In like manner when I used to explain to him our several systems of natural philosophy, he would laugh, "that a creature pretending to reason should value itself upon the knowledge of other people's conjectures, and in things where that knowledge, if it were certain, could be of no use." Wherein he agreed entirely with the sentiments of Socrates, as Plato delivers them: which I mention as the highest honour I can do to that prince of philosophers. I have often since reflected what destruction such doctrine would make in the libraries of Europe, and how many paths of fame would be then shut up in the learned world.

The bulk of Swift's writings are prose; but that he could be at once satirical and poignant in verse is shown by the lines which he wrote in 1731, to commemorate his supposed death. He really died fourteen years later. His estimate of his fellow-creatures may be gathered from the following passages:

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From Dublin soon to London spread,  
 'Tis told at Court, "The Dean is dead."  
 And Lady Suffolk, in the spleen,  
 Runs laughing up to tell the Queen.  
 The Queen, so gracious, mild and good,  
 Cries, "Is he gone! 'Tis time he should!"

\* \* \* \* \*

Here shift the scene to represent  
 How those I love my death lament.  
 Poor Pope would grieve a month, and Gay  
 A week, and Arbuthnot a day.  
 St. John himself will scarce forbear  
 To bite his pen and drop a tear.  
 The rest will give a shrug, and cry,  
 "I'm sorry—but we all must die!"

\* \* \* \* \*

My female friends whose tender hearts  
 Have better learn'd to act their parts,  
 Receive the news in doleful dumps:  
 "The Dean is dead: (Pray what are trumps?):  
 Then, Lord have mercy on his soul!  
 (Ladies, I'll venture for the vole.<sup>1</sup>)  
 Six deans, they say, must bear the pall,  
 (I wish I knew what king to call.)  
 Madam, your husband will attend  
 The funeral of so good a friend?"  
 "No, Madam, 'tis a shocking sight,  
 And he's engaged to-morrow night;  
 My Lady Club will take it ill  
 If he should fail her at quadrille.  
 He loved the Dean—(I lead a heart)  
 But dearest friends, they say, must part.  
 His time has come, he ran his race,  
 We hope he's in a better place."

\* \* \* \* \*

He gave the little wealth he had  
 To build a house for fools and mad;  
 And shew'd by one satiric touch  
 No nation wanted it so much.  
 That kingdom he had left his debtor,  
 I wish it soon may have a better.

Satire is the delight, probably, of a minority, and theirs only in certain moods. Part of one political satire

<sup>1</sup> Winning all the tricks in a deal.

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of our own day, more light-hearted, more humane, and for that reason perhaps more acceptable, may well close this chapter, Mr. Joseph Campbell's very delightful *Orangeman*:

A ginger-faced man  
With a walrus moustache,  
His eyes, like his soul,  
Of the colour of ash

With the fire gone out of it:  
Breaking to flame  
Of a sulphurous glare  
At the touch of the name

William, for Billy  
Of Orange, he knows  
Saved him and his seed  
From the devil's own woes !

His faith, 'Sixteen-Ninety;  
His love, none; his hope,  
That hell may one day  
Get the soul of the Pope.

\* \* \* \*

Not that the æsthete  
In him is dumb:  
There's the flap of his banner,  
The tap of his drum.

Straussian discords,  
For peace, and—revolt ?  
The crash of the paver,  
The crack of the bolt.

A monster ! Not quite,  
As you guess from my song;  
But clay marred in the mixing,—  
God's image gone wrong.



## CHAPTER XII

### ELEGIES

**A**N Elegy is a *Lament*. In common use, it is often restricted to a lament over the dead, but that is an improper narrowing of its meaning. There are laments over places, over lost love, over the past (which is never "dead"), over an individual's misery or failure; there are laments over departed pet animals, and so forth. Probably the earliest we have in our literature is Wigláf's over Beowulf:

So ! this may he speak who will say sooth  
That the man-lord who gave you gifts,  
Gear of war in which ye stand there,  
(When he on the ale-bench gave often,  
To the hall-sitters, helmet and war-shirt,  
The Chief to his thanes, such as he, the bravest,  
Might find anywhere, far or near),  
That he cast away wholly war-weeds,  
His defence, when battle overtook him.  
The Folk-King had no need to boast  
Of his war-companions; yet God, Ruler of Victories,  
Granted him to avenge himself  
Alone with sword-edge, when he needed valour.  
To him, in the strife, little of life-defence  
Could I give; nevertheless I undertook  
To help my kinsman beyond my might.  
I was ever the worse when I struck with my sword  
The deadly foe; fire ran quicker,  
Welled from within: too few defenders  
Thronged round their chief, when trouble befell him.  
Now shall treasure-sharing, and gifts of the sword  
All country-joy fail your loved kindred.  
Every tribesman must go empty of land-right,  
After the nobles from afar shall hear  
Of your flight, of your inglorious deed.  
To every man of valour, death is better  
Than a life of reproach.

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In this elegy, Wigláf, who alone out of the host had gone to succour his liege lord, mingled with his grief for the slain chieftain all his shame and pain at the selfish slackness of his comrades in arms.

Perhaps the next, in time, is *The Wife's Complaint*, a very ancient poem of unknown authorship, in which a woman laments her separation from her husband, and her solitary imprisonment in a dark lonely wood, because his relations had accused her falsely:

O full oft with vows we bound us  
That, save death alone, nought should e'er divide us,  
Nothing in the world. Now all changed is that!  
Now alas! it is as though that erstwhile friendship  
Ne'er had been between us. Far away or near  
I must bear the hatred of my best-beloved;  
In a grove amid the wood, they have garred<sup>1</sup> me dwell.  
Underneath a holm-oak tree, in this earth-hollow.  
Old is this earth-house: I am all one long desire!  
Dim these caverned dells, steep the downs above,  
Bitter my borough-hedges, with wild briars o'ergrown.  
Dreary is my dwelling. Here my lord's departure  
Oft has wrought me wretchedly.

Lovers in the world there are  
Who in loving live together, lie together on their bed,  
While I in the early dawn all alone am going;  
When I needs must sit alone, all the summer-long day,  
When I weeping thus bewail for my woeful banishment,  
My uncounted sorrows.

This is, of course, a lament not for physical death, but for lost love, for the wreckage of life.

Among the "Northern Ballads" are some, singularly beautiful, which may be called elegies. It would be hard to find lamentation for the dead at once more heart-wringing and more revengeful than *Helen of Kirkconnell*. Its date and authorship are unknown. Tradition declares that one Andrew Fleming loved the daughter of the Laird of Kirkconnell. She having slipped in between the rival suitor and Andrew, received the bullet, and died in the arms of her lover, who forthwith pursued and killed the murderer:

<sup>1</sup> Made.

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I wish I were where Helen lies;  
Night and day on me she cries;  
O that I were where Helen lies,  
On fair Kirkconnell lea!

Curst be the heart that thought the thought,  
And curst the hand that fired the shot,  
When in my arms burd Helen dropt,  
And died to succour me.

O think na ye my heart was sair,  
When my love dropt and spake nae mair!  
There did she swoon wi' meikle care,  
On fair Kirkconnell lea.

And I went down the water side,  
None but my foe to be my guide,  
None but my foe to be my guide,  
On fair Kirkconnell lea.

I cross'd the stream, my sword did draw,  
I hack'd him into pieces sma',  
I hack'd him into pieces sma',  
For her sake that died for me.

O Helen fair, beyond compare!  
I'll make a garland o' your hair,  
Shall bind my heart for evermair,  
Until the day I dee!

O that I were where Helen lies!  
Night and day on me she cries;  
Out of my bed she bids me rise,  
Says, "Haste, and come to me!"

O Helen fair! O Helen chaste!  
Were I with thee I would be blest,  
Where thou liest low and tak'st thy rest,  
On fair Kirkconnell lea.

I wish my grave were growing green,  
A winding-sheet drawn o'er my e'en,  
And I in Helen's arms lying,  
On fair Kirkconnell lea.

I wish I were where Helen lies!  
Night and day on me she cries,  
And I am weary of the skies,  
For her sake that died for me.

## ELEGIES

From the North, from Yorkshire, came the haunting death-song, *The Lyke-wake Dirge*, which, from an unknown date until at least 1629, was sung over the dead. Some verses seem to have been lost; but those which we still have show that rooted belief in the supernatural which materialism has never yet been able to destroy from among us:

This ae nighte, this ae nighte,  
*Everie nighte and alle,*  
Fire, and sleete, and candle-lighte  
*And Christe receive thy saule.*

When thou from hence away art past,  
*Everie nighte and alle,*  
To Whinney-Muir thou comest at last,  
*And Christe receive thy saule.*

If ever thou gavest hosen and shoon,  
*Everie nighte and alle,*  
Sit thee down and put them on,  
*And Christe receive thy saule.*

If hosen and shoon thou gavest nane,  
*Everie nighte and alle,*  
The whinnes shall pricke thee to the bare bane,  
*And Christe receive thy saule.*

From Whinny-Muir when thou may'st passe,  
*Everie nighte and alle,*  
To Brigg o' Dread thou comest at last,  
*And Christe receive thy saule.<sup>1</sup>*

\* \* \* \* \*

From Brigg o' Dread when thou mayst passe,  
*Everie nighte and alle,*  
To Purgatorie Fire thou comest at last,  
*And Christe receive thy saule.*

If ever thou gavest meate or drinke,  
*Everie nighte and alle,*  
The fire shall never make thee shrinke,  
*And Christe receive thy saule.*

---

<sup>1</sup> Next stanzas lost.

If meate or drinke thou gavest nane,  
*Everie nighte and alle,*  
 The fire will burne thee to the bare bane,  
*And Christe receive thy saule.*

This ae nighte, this ae nighte,  
*Everie nighte and alle,*  
 Fire, and sleete, and candle-lighte  
*And Christe receive thy saule.*

The Authorised Version of the Bible contains immortal elegies. There is, for example, the Preacher's warning, which he mingles with a lamentation for the state of those who have left the "sweet light," and the "pleasant sun" of this world:

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.

While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain:

In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the window be darkened,

And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low;

Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets.

Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.

Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

Dr. Driver inclines to some date about 200 B.C. as that of the book *Ecclesiastes*. In spite of the moving beauty of this passage, the hope of immortality in it is hesitating. Another book, *Wisdom*, written probably about the time of the Christian Era, follows up, if we may so speak, this "returning" spirit, in great words which are an indestructible part not only of our spiritual but also of our literary heritage. In *Wisdom* we have not a lament but a hymn, not an elegy, but a

## ELEGIES

pæan. It seems so to follow on and correct the Preacher's gloom that it must be quoted:

For God created man to be immortal, and made him to be an image of His own eternity.

Nevertheless, through envy of the devil came death into the world; and they that do hold of his side shall find it.

But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them.

In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die; and their departure is taken for misery.

And their going from us to be utter destruction: but they are in peace.

\* \* \* \* \*

Thus the righteous that is dead shall condemn the ungodly which are living: and youth that is soon perfected the many years and old age of the unrighteous.

For they shall see the end of the wise, and shall not understand what God in his counsel hath decreed of him, and to what end the Lord hath set him in safety.

They shall see him and despise him, but God shall laugh them to scorn . . .

Then shall the righteous man stand in great boldness before the face of such as have afflicted him, and made no account of his labours.

When they see it, they shall be troubled with terrible fear, and shall be amazed at the strangeness of his salvation, so far beyond all that they looked for.

And they repenting and groaning for anguish of spirit shall say within themselves, This was he, whom we had sometime in derision, and a proverb of reproach:

We fools accounted his life madness, and his end to be without honour. How is he numbered among the children of God, and his lot is among the saints!

\* \* \* \* \*

We wearied ourselves in the way of wickedness and destruction. . . . What hath pride profited us? or what good hath riches with our vaunting brought us?

All those things are passed away like a shadow, and as a post that hasted by;

\* \* \* \* \*

For the hope of the ungodly is like dust that is blown away with the wind; like a thin froth that is driven away with the storm, like as the smoke which is dispersed here and there with a tempest, and passeth away as the remembrance of a guest that tarrieth but a day.

But the righteous live for evermore; their reward also is with the Lord, and the care of them is with the Most High.

These two passages from the Wisdom-literature of the Bible are unique: the gloom of the Preacher, the serenity and confidence of the Son of Sirach. They should ever be kept in remembrance together.

The great elegy, using the word in the sense of a lament for the beloved dead, to be found in the *Old Testament* is, of course, David's over Saul and Jonathan:

The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen!

Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.

Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither let there be rain upon you, nor fields of offerings: for there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, the shield of Saul as though he had not been anointed with oil.

From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty; the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty.

Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided: they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions.

Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet with other delights, who put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel.

How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thine high places.

I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.

How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished.

There is one other great lament in the Bible which cannot be passed by, this dirge for the destruction of a nation's greatness. The following is Coverdale's version:

By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept: when we remembered thee, O Sion.

As for our harps, we hanged them up: upon the trees that are therein.

For they that led us away captive required of us then a song, and melody, in our heaviness: Sing us one of the songs of Sion.

How shall we sing the Lord's song: in a strange land?

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.

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If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth: yea, if I prefer not Jerusalem in my mirth.

Remember the children of Edom, O Lord, in the day of Jerusalem: how they said, Down with it, down with it, even to the ground.

O daughter of Babylon, wasted with misery: yea, happy shall he be that rewardeth thee, as thou hast served us.

Blessed shall he be that taketh thy children: and throweth them against the stones.

The author of this Psalm is unknown. Obviously its date must be put after the exile in the sixth century B.C. Professor Cheyne once suggested that it might be a Maccabean Psalm, which would bring it down to the second century B.C. What cannot be denied is that it tells of a nation's mourning and woe over departed greatness, joy and the peace of home.

It is not only as superb translations greatly to be enjoyed that these passages from the Bible can be considered part of our national literature. By long familiarity they had sunk into our thought and feeling, until, recently, people seem in large numbers to have determined to give up reading the greatest literature in the world, so that these sublime thoughts now strike many as strange and alien.

In our native literature two great elegies stand out from all the rest, and these are not Gray's famous lines *In a Country Churchyard*, fine as they are, though their beauty has been dimmed too often by clumsy handling, nor the well-known *Burial of Sir John Moore*. Both of these have a place from which no time nor mischance can dislodge them. But our supreme elegies are Milton's *Lycidas* (1638), in which he lamented the death by drowning of his Cambridge friend, Edward King; and Shelley's *Adonais* (1822), a lament for Keats' premature death.

Unfortunately, Milton mixed up political and theological party matters with his lamentations; the following lines avoid all that and are a beautiful instance of his purest poetry:



## ENGLISH LITERATURE

Yet once more, O ye laurels, and once more  
 Ye myrtles brown, with ivy never-sere,  
 I come to pluck your berries harsh and crude,  
 And with forc'd fingers rude  
 Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year.  
 Bitter constraint, and sad occasion dear,  
 Compels me to disturb your season due:  
 For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime,  
 Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer:  
 Who would not sing for Lycidas? he knew  
 Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme.  
 He must not float upon his wat'ry bier  
 Unwept, and welter to the parching wind,  
 Without the meed of some melodious tear.

\* \* \* \* \*

For we were nurst upon the self-same hill,  
 Fed the same flock, by fountain, shade and rill.  
 Together both, ere the high lawns appear'd  
 Under the opening eyelids of the Morn,  
 We drove afield: and both together heard  
 What time the gray-fly winds her sultry horn,  
 Batt'ning our flocks with the fresh dews of night,  
 Oft till the star that rose at ev'ning bright,  
 Towards Heav'n's descent had sloped his westering wheel.  
 Meanwhile the rural ditties were not mute,  
 Temper'd to the oaten flute;  
 Rough satyrs danced, and fauns with cloven heel  
 From the glad sound would not be absent long,  
 And old Damoetas loved to hear our song.  
 But O the heavy change, now thou art gone,  
 Now thou art gone, and never must return!  
 Thee, shepherd, thee the woods, and desert caves,  
 With wild thyme and the gadding vine o'ergrown,  
 And all their echoes mourn.  
 The willows and the hazel copses green  
 Shall now no more be seen,  
 Fanning their joyous leaves to thy soft lays:  
 As killing as the canker to the rose,  
 Or taint-worm<sup>1</sup> to the weanling herds that graze,  
 Or frost to flowers, that their gay wardrobe wear,  
 When first the white-thorn blows;  
 Such, Lycidas, thy loss to shepherd's ear.

\* \* \* \* \*

Ye valleys low, where the mild whispers use  
 Of shades and wanton winds, and gushing brooks,

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<sup>1</sup> Sir Thomas Browne's "Tainct," p. 170.

## ELEGIES

On whose fresh lap the swart star sparely looks,  
 Throw hither all your quaint enamell'd eyes,  
 That on the green turf suck the honied show'rs,  
 And purple all the ground with vernal flow'rs.  
 Bring the rathe<sup>1</sup> primrose that forsaken dies,  
 The tufted crow-toe, and pale jessamine,  
 The white pink and the pansy freakt with jet,  
 The glowing violet,  
 The musk-rose, and the well attir'd woodbine;  
 With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head,  
 And every flower that sad embroidery wears:  
 Bid Amaranthus all his beauty shed,  
 And daffadillies fill their cups with tears,  
 To strew the laureat hearse where Lycid lies.

In *Modern Painters*, Ruskin severely criticised these closing lines, declaring that compared with Perdita's famous "flower" lines in *The Winter's Tale*, Milton's imagery here is "part of iron and part of clay." Perhaps Ruskin forgot Milton's love for Italy, his descent from the men of the Renaissance, and failed to see the kind of beauty here which is so akin to the flower-starred foreground of Botticelli's *Primavera*.

In a much lesser degree, Shelley gave some place to his personal wrath against the dense or vicious world, which, as he believed, had by its cruel neglect or abuse hurried on the catastrophe of Keats' death. It is possible, as in *Lycidas*, to disengage the most beautiful portions from these less happy passages. The following stanzas enshrine Shelley's faith in immortality:

### I.

I weep for Adonais—he is dead !  
 O weep for Adonais ! though our tears  
 Thaw not the frost which binds so dear a head !  
 And thou, sad Hour, selected from all years  
 To mourn our loss, rouse thy obscure compeers,  
 And teach them thine own sorrow ! Say: " With me  
 Died Adonais; till the Future dares  
 Forget the Past, his fate and fame shall be  
 An echo and a light unto eternity !"

\* \* \* \* \*

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<sup>1</sup> Early; this obsolete adjective survives in *rather*.

## ENGLISH LITERATURE

### XXXIX.

Peace, peace ! he is not dead, he doth not sleep—  
He hath awakened from the dream of life—  
'Tis we, who lost in stormy visions, keep  
With phantoms an unprofitable strife,  
And in mad trance, strike with our spirit's knife  
Invulnerable nothings. . . .

### XL.

He has outsoared the shadow of our night,  
Envy and calumny and hate and pain,  
And that unrest which men miscall delight,  
Can touch him not and torture not again;  
From the contagion of the world's slow stain  
He is secure, and now can never mourn  
A heart grown cold, a head grown gray in vain ;  
Nor, when the spirit's self has ceased to burn,  
With sparkless ashes load an unlamented urn.

\* \* \* \* \*

### XLII.

He is made one with Nature: there is heard  
His voice in all her music, from the moan  
Of thunder to the song of night's sweet bird;  
He is a presence to be felt and known  
In darkness and in light, from herb and stone,  
Spreading itself where'er that Power may move  
Which has withdrawn its being to his own;  
Which wields the world with never-wearied love,  
Sustains it from beneath and kindles it above.

### XLIII.

He is a portion of the loveliness  
Which once he made more lovely. . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

### LV.

The breath whose might I have invoked in song  
Descends on me; my spirit's bark is driven  
Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng  
Whose sails were never to the tempest given;  
The massy earth and spherèd skies are riven !  
I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar ;  
While burning through the inmost veil of Heaven,  
The soul of Adonais, like a star,  
Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are.

## ELEGIES

There is no poetry in our language woven of more shining, deathless tissue than this. Though *Adonais* is an elegy and opens on a note of sorrow, it rises to the heights of a triumphant hymn.

It is not very often, perhaps, that a person would dare to write his own elegy; but the elusive strange poet Robert Herrick (1591-1634) did, in lines which are almost forgotten, but which in their ingenuous simplicity are extraordinarily winning:

When a Daffadill I see  
Hanging down his head t'wards me  
Guesse I may what I must be:  
First, I shall decline my head;  
Secondly, I shall be dead,  
Lastly, safely buried.

From the seventeenth century, too, comes Sir Thomas Browne's simple and so characteristic elegy on the crowd of "undistinguished" folk:

Happy are those whom privacy makes innocent, who deal so with men in this world, that they are not afraid to meet them in the next, who, when they die, make no commotion among the dead, and are not touched with that poetical taunt of Isaiah.<sup>1</sup>

In a key which has something in it of Isaiah's woe, the late Mr. George Wyndham wrote an elegy on the wreckage of human life and national joy, beginning on this note of stormy grief:

The waves climb to the cliff and the cliff repels them,  
So the waves sing their long desire of the land.  
The winds ask their way of the night, but she never tells them,  
Complaining still of a sorrow she cannot understand.

The conquered nations of earth have lost their birthright,  
They sing of the long ago when their rulers were kings,  
All their value that rose once proud to set the Earth aright  
Sinks in a sob of sorrow, and sobbing sings.

---

<sup>1</sup> They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms;

That made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof: that opened not the house of his prisoners? (Isaiah xiv. 16, 17).

The chill eighteenth century seems to have excelled in the heavier kind of monumental elegy, a mass of which still encumbers and spoils the walls of some of our cathedrals and parish churches. William Cowper (1731-1800), saddest of men, wrote a lament, *The Poplar Field*, an elegy on the failure of his own life and hopes, and therewith it would seem an elegy on everything and everybody. It is a curious thing that he should have dressed so grey a mood in so tripping a measure:



The poplars are fell'd, farewell to the shade,  
And the whispering sound of the cool colonnade;  
The winds play no longer and sing in the leaves,  
Nor Ouse on his bosom their image receives.

Twelve years have elapsed since I last took a view  
Of my favourite field, and the bank where they grew:  
And now in the grass behold they are laid,  
And the tree is my seat that once lent me a shade!

The blackbird has fled to another retreat,  
Where the hazels afford him a screen from the heat,  
And the scene where his melody charm'd me before  
Resounds with his sweet-flowing ditty no more.

My fugitive years are all hasting away,  
And I must ere long lie as lowly as they,  
With a turf on my breast and a stone at my head,  
Ere another such grove shall arise in its stead.

The change both my heart and my fancy employs,  
I reflect on the frailty of man and his joys;  
Short-lived as we are, yet our pleasures, we see,  
Have a still shorter date, and die sooner than we.

The longest and best-known elegy of the nineteenth century was Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, his lament on the early death of his friend, Arthur Henry Hallam. No poem is perhaps more accessible, so often is it reprinted: none more difficult to deal with fairly by quotation. It is doubtful whether it will continue to hold the very highest place in the poet's work. It contains beautiful poetry; but its thought belonged, more than

is usual in English Literature, to a definite "school"; and the school has almost entirely passed away, having fallen between the two stools of revealed religion and open unbelief.

Matthew Arnold's lament for the poet Arthur Hugh Clough, *Thyrsis*, may to some extent lie open to similar criticism: he shared and intensified Tennyson's "philosophic doubt." But the spirit of Oxford so haunts and informs it, that it makes more than its own strictly personal appeal. The poet dominates the individual mourner in these two most beautiful stanzas, each true to so different an aspect of human life, yet brought together here quite naturally by that great uniter of men, our common human sorrow:

Thou hearest the immortal chants of old !  
 Putting his sickle to the perilous grain  
 In the hot cornfield of the Phrygian king,  
 For thee the Lityerses-song<sup>1</sup> again  
 Young Daphnis with his silver voice doth sing;  
     Sings his Sicilian fold,  
 His sheep, his hapless love, his blinded eyes—  
 And how a call celestial round him rang,  
 And heavenward from the fountain-brink he sprang,  
 And all the marvel of the golden skies.

There thou art gone, and me thou leavest here  
 Sole in these fields ! yet will I not despair.  
 Despair I will not, while I yet descry  
 'Neath the soft canopy of English air  
 That lonely tree<sup>2</sup> against the western sky.  
     Still, still these slopes, 'tis clear,  
 Our Gipsy-Scholar haunts, outliving thee !  
 Fields where soft sheep from cages pull the hay,  
 Woods with anemonies in flower till May,  
 Know him a wanderer still: then why not me ?

---

<sup>1</sup> Lityerses, King of Phrygia, forced strangers to compete with him in reaping corn: those who failed were killed. Daphnis, the typical Sicilian shepherd of Greek poetry, was saved because Hercules took his place, beat Lityerses and killed him. The Lityerses-song became the traditional Sicilian reaping song. (Clough died at Florence in 1861.)

<sup>2</sup> The tree is not the Fyfield Elm, referred to in Arnold's *Scholar-Gipsy*, as Mr. B. H. Blackwell has shown.

Interesting, as showing another side of Arnold, and very attractive to some of us, is his elegy on his beloved dog, Geist:

Four years!—and didst thou stay above  
The ground, which hides thee now, but four?  
And all that life, and all that love,  
Were crowded, Geist! into no more?

Only four years those winning ways,  
Which make me for thy presence yearn,  
Call'd us to pet thee or to praise,  
Dear little friend! at every turn?

That loving heart, that patient soul,  
Had they indeed no longer span,  
To run their course, and reach their goal,  
And read their homily to man?

That liquid, melancholy eye,  
From whose pathetic, soul-fed springs  
Seem'd surging the Virgilian cry,  
The sense of tears in mortal things——

\* \* \* \* \*

Yes, only four! and not the course  
Of all the centuries yet to come,  
And not the infinite resource  
Of Nature, with her countless sum

Of figures, with her fulness vast  
Of new creation evermore,  
Can ever quite repeat the past,  
Or just thy little self restore!

\* \* \* \* \*

Yet would we keep thee in our heart—  
Would fix our favourite on the scene,  
Nor let thee utterly depart  
And be as if thou ne'er hadst been.

And so there rise these lines of verse  
On lips that rarely form them now:  
While to each other we rehearse:  
*Such ways, such arts, such looks hadst thou!*

We stroke thy broad brown paws again,  
We bid thee to thy vacant chair,  
We greet thee by the window-pane,  
We hear thy scuffle on the stair;

## ELEGIES

We see the flaps of thy large ears  
Quick raised to see which way we go;  
Crossing the frozen lake, appears  
Thy small black figure on the snow!

\* \* \* \*

We lay thee, close within our reach,  
Here, where the grass is smooth and warm,  
Between the holly and the beech,  
Where oft we watch'd thy couchant form,

Asleep, yet lending half an ear  
To travellers on the Portsmouth road;—  
There choose we thee, O guardian dear,  
Mark'd with a stone, thy last abode!

The only poem which seems quite fit to be quoted next to this is not really like it, nor is it an elegy on a pet animal. It is, moreover, as uneven, as jolty in its abrupt lines—so apt to the broken sorrow inspiring it—as Arnold's verse is polished into silver-grey melancholy. But Mr. Squire's *Bulldog* is surely one of the most living of all the poems called forth by the miseries of the Great War; it breathes the greater simplicity which marked those four dreadful years, the crudeness, the frank avowal of moods which Englishmen generally hide, the freedom from "fuss" and unreality. Maurice Baring wrote a fine elegy on the death of Lord Lucas, which will probably live in our literature. Yet, written though it is in the "grand manner," a noble poem on a noble man, it just misses that simplicity of irremediable sorrow which makes Mr. Squire's poem *To a Bulldog*, with all its roughness and unconventionality, a thing unique in early twentieth-century poetry:

We shan't see Willy any more, Mamie,  
He won't be coming any more:  
He came back once and again and again,  
But he won't get leave any more.

We looked from the window and there was his cab,  
And we ran downstairs like a streak,  
And he said, "Hullo, you bad dog," and you crouched to the floor,  
Paralysed to hear him speak.



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And then let fly at his face and his chest  
Till I had to hold you down,  
While he took off his cap and his gloves and his coat,  
And his bag and his thonged Sam Browne.

We went upstairs to the studio,  
The three of us, just as of old,  
And you lay down and I sat and talked to him  
As round the room he strolled.

Here in the room where, years ago  
Before the old life stopped,  
He worked all day with his slippers and his pipe,  
He would pick up the threads he'd dropped,

Fondling all the drawings he had left behind,  
Glad to find them all still the same,  
And opening the cupboards to look at his belongings  
. . . Every time he came.

But now I know what a dog doesn't know,  
Though you'll thrust your head on my knee,  
And try to draw me from the absent-mindedness  
That you find so dull in me.

And all your life you will never know  
What I wouldn't tell you even if I could,  
That the last time we waved him away  
Willy went for good.

But sometimes as you lie on the hearthrug  
Sleeping in the warmth of the stove,  
Even through your muddled old canine brain  
Shapes from the past may rove.

You'll scarcely remember, even in a dream,  
How we brought home a silly little pup,  
With a big square head, and little crooked legs  
That could scarcely bear him up,

But your tail will tap at the memory  
Of a man whose friend you were,  
Who was always kind, though he called you a naughty dog  
When he found you on his chair;

Who'd make you face a reproving finger,  
And solemnly lecture you,  
Till your head hung downwards and you looked very sheepish:  
And you'll dream of your triumphs too.

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Of summer evening chases in the garden  
When you dodged us all about with a bone:  
We were three boys, and you were the cleverest,  
But now we're two alone.

When summer comes again,  
And the long sunsets fade,  
We shall have to go on playing the feeble game for two  
That since the war we've played.

And though you run expectant as you always do  
To the uniforms we meet,  
You'll never find Willy among all the soldiers  
In even the longest street,

Nor in any crowd; yet, strange and bitter thought,  
Even now were the old words said,  
If I tried the old trick and said "Where's Willy?"  
You would quiver and lift your head,

And your brown eyes would look to ask if I was serious,  
And wait for the word to spring.  
Sleep undisturbed: I shan't say *that* again,  
You innocent old thing.

I must sit, not speaking, on the sofa,  
While you lie asleep upon the floor.  
For he's suffered a thing that dogs couldn't dream of,  
And he won't be coming here any more.

A very different poem produced by the war, an elegy which "throws back" to the old Scottish searching, haunting pathos, is Ewart Alan MacIntosh's *Cha till Maccruimein*, a lament for the 4th Camerons as they were piped away to the fatal fields of war:

The pipes in the street were playing bravely,  
The marching lads went by,  
With merry hearts and voices singing  
My friends marched out to die;  
But I was hearing a lonely pibroch  
Out of an older war,  
"Farewell, farewell, farewell, MacCrimmon,  
MacCrimmon comes no more."

And every lad in his heart was dreaming  
Of honour and wealth to come,  
And honour and noble pride were calling  
To the tune of the pipes and drum;

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But I was hearing a woman singing  
On dark Dunvegan shore,  
"In battle or peace, with wealth or honour,  
MacCrimmon comes no more."

And there in front of the men were marching,  
With feet that made no mark,  
The grey old ghosts of the ancient fighters  
Come back again from the dark;  
And in front of them MacCrimmon piping  
A weary tune and sore,  
"On the gathering day, for ever and ever,  
MacCrimmon comes no more."

In the middle of the nineteenth century a poet, Lord de Tabley, worked for many years without ever publishing his poems. His interest lay chiefly among classical stories. Suddenly in the early nineties the poetry-reading public was startled by the appearance, in one of the monthly magazines, of *Orpheus in Hades*. The following lines are part of Orpheus' prayer to the Queen of Hades for the restoration of his lost bride Eurydice, snatched from him on their wedding morning. In this invocation, he first related the story of her death; then followed these lines of hopeless grief:

Sobbing cadence of funereal gloom,  
We wind her in the raiment of the dead,  
The shrouded mantle of eternal sleep,  
Ay me, the dear one. Then as twilight fell,  
With torch and taper rounded, crowned with yew,  
Wailing we bore her to the cypress lines,  
Sown with the urns and ash of fiery hearts  
Of old-world lovers, cold and gone to dust.  
Thither we bore her pallid on her bier,  
A silver moon cradled in ebon cloud;  
And over her we sprinkled marigolds,  
Flowers of the dead, stars on the sable pall;  
And there was one more gravestone, one more heart  
Broken, and in the world no other change.

What right have I to live, so crushed with woe?  
I dare not see the light now she is gone.  
I hate to watch the flower set up its face.  
I loathe the trembling shimmer of the sea,  
Its heaving roods of intertangled weed  
And orange sea-wrack with its necklace fruit;

## ELEGIES

The stale, insipid cadence of the dawn,  
The ringdove, tedious harper on five tones,  
The eternal havoc of the sodden leaves,  
Rotting the floors of Autumn. I am weary,  
Weary and incomplete and desolate.  
To me Spring, sceptred with her daffodil,  
Droops with a blight of dim mortality,  
And the birds sing Death and Eurydice.

Throughout this book one claim has been specially made for our literature, that it offers an immense variety of methods, matters, standpoints. This quality is as notable in our elegies as elsewhere. There is, even in the few here quoted, a striking dissimilarity one from another. This restrained paragraph, the last from John Morley's essay on the death of the great nineteenth-century philosopher John Stuart Mill, adds yet another note in the orchestra of English lamentation. It is, in its restraint, in its controlled idealism, worthy of the man who wrote it, and of the man about whom it was written:

Alas, the sorrowful day which ever dogs our delight followed very quickly. The nightingale that he longed for fills the darkness with music, but not for the ear of the dead master: he rests in the deeper darkness where the silence is unbroken for ever. We may console ourselves with the reflection offered by the dying Socrates to his sorrowful companions: he who has arrayed the soul in her own proper jewels of moderation and justice and courage and nobleness and truth, is ever ready for the journey when his time comes. We have lost a great teacher and example of knowledge and virtue, but men will long feel the presence of his character about them, making them ashamed of what is indolent and selfish, and encouraging them to all disinterested labour, both in trying to do good and in trying to find out what the good is,—which is harder.

## CHAPTER XIII

### IDYLLS

**B**Y the word *Idyll* is meant a description in prose or verse of some scene or event which is striking, picturesque, and complete in itself. Such an idyll may stand alone, or it may form a kind of interlude in a longer composition. In our literature idyllic passages are commoner than isolated idylls. Indeed, the actual name is best known to us by the *Idylls of the King*, and Browning's *Dramatic Idylls*.

A nation which has cared so truly and comprehendingly for the beauties and charms of its own native land could not help producing idyllic scenes and passages; and as early as the ninth century, probably from our great poet Cynewulf, we find this description of the fabled phoenix's home:

I have heard that there is far hence in eastern realms a land most noble, widely known to men. . . . That plain is full of beauty blest with joys, with the fairest fragrance of earth. Unique is that island. . . . That is a winsome plain, the woods are green, far-stretching 'neath the sky. Nor there may any rain nor snow, nor breath of frost, nor blast of fire, nor storm of hail nor fall of rime, nor heat of sun, nor everlasting cold, nor warm weather, nor winter shower work harm a whit, but the plain endureth blessed and wholesome. That noble land is starred with blossoms. There stand no hills nor mountains steep, no stony cliffs rise high as here with us, nor dales nor glens nor mountain gorges, caves nor crags. No whit of roughness bideth there; but the pleasant field blossoming with delights bringeth forth beneath the clouds. . . . Serene is that pleasant plain; its sunny grove gleameth, winsome its woodland glades. Its increase faileth not, its pleasant fruit; but ever the trees stand green as God gave bidding. In winter and in summer are the groves in like wise hung with fruit; never a leaf fadeth in the air, nor shall flame work them harm for ever, ere that the ending of the world shall be. As of old, the turmoil of the waters, the sea-flood

## IDYLLS

covered all the world, the compass of the earth, yet that noble plain stood all unhurt, firm held against the water's surging, blessed, uninjured of the tossing waves, through the grace of God: so it shall bide in blossoming until the coming of the fire of the judgment of God, when the chambers of death, the shadowy sepulchres of men, shall be open.

As we pass down the centuries we find that Chaucer, true lover of country things, has filled *The Romaunt of the Rose* with idyllic little pictures, of which one of the most beautiful is his picture of the river—

with that water that ran so clear  
My face I washed.

Later on, he tells of the garden, where eventually he found the well of Narcissus, and the rose with the wonderful bud. How singularly attractive this is:

The trees were set as I devise,  
One from another in assise,<sup>1</sup>  
Five or six fathoms apart, I trow,  
But they were great and high also:  
And to keep out well the sun,  
The crops were together thickly run,  
And every branch in another knit  
And on them fully green leaves sit,  
The sun could not there descend  
Lest the tender grass were burned.  
There men both roes and does might see  
And of squirrels full great plenty,  
From bough to bough always leaping.  
Conies also there were playing,  
Out of their little burrows coming  
Of many sorts and colours running,  
And there in tournaments they met  
Upon the springing grass all set.

Francis Bacon once planned a garden on what he called "royal ordering"—namely, so that at every season of the year there should be "things of beauty." The whole, as he made it, is exquisite, but his provision of fragrance, so difficult to present in words, is perhaps the most purely idyllic passage of all:

<sup>1</sup> i.e., as if they were seated so.

Because the breath of flowers is far sweeter in the air (where it comes and goes, like the warbling of music) than in the hand, therefore nothing is more fit for that delight than to know what be the flowers and plants that do best perfume the air. Roses, damask and red, are fast flowers of their smell; so that you may walk by a whole row of them, and find nothing of their sweetness, yea, though it be in a morning's dew. Bays likewise yield no smell as they grow, rosemary little, nor sweet marjoram. That which above all others yields the sweetest smell in the air, is the violet; especially the white, double violet, which comes twice a year, about the middle of April and about Bartholomew-tide. Next to that is the musk-rose. Then the strawberry leaves dying, with a most excellent cordial smell. Then the flower of the vines: it is a little dust like the dust of a bent, which grows upon the cluster in the first coming forth. Then sweetbriar. Then wall-flowers, which are very delightful to be set under a parlour or lower chamber window. Then pinks and gilliflowers, especially the matted pink and clove gilliflowers. Then the flowers of the lime-tree. Then the honeysuckles so they be somewhat afar off. Of bean-flowers I speak not, because they are field flowers. But those which perfume the air most delightfully, not passed by as the rest, but being trodden upon and crushed, are three, that is burnet, wild thyme and water-mints. Therefore, you are to set whole alleys of them, to have the pleasure when you walk or tread.

The massed fragrance of all this recalls that other garden in the *Song of Songs* :

A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon.

Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south: blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden and eat his pleasant fruits. . . .

My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies.

\* \* \* \* \*

I went down into the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley, and to see whether the vine flourished, and the pomegranates budded.

It was well indeed that the Bible, and specially the prophetic and poetical books, should have been translated into English when the sweet and musical prose of the seventeenth century was in its highest perfection.

Thomas Traherne, writing later in the same century, tried to make men comprehend this world's unutterable beauty. In the early pages of his great book

*Centuries of Meditations*, only by an accident recovered a few years ago from a second-hand bookstall, he claimed that

The world is a mirror of infinite beauty, yet no man sees it. It is a Temple of Majesty, yet no man regards it. It is a region of Light and Peace did not men disquiet it. It is the Paradise of God. It is more to man since he is fallen than it was before. It is the place of Angels and the Gate of Heaven.

But he could not be satisfied to leave it there; he could not be content that men should continue not to see it, if by hook or crook, if by idyllic presentation he could make them see the world as he himself saw it:

The corn was orient and immortal wheat, which never should be reaped, nor was ever sown. I thought it had stood from everlasting to everlasting. The dust and stones of the street were as precious as gold: the gates were at first the end of the world. . . . Boys and girls, tumbling in the street, and playing, were moving jewels. I knew not that they were born or should die; but all things abided eternally as they were in their proper places. Eternity was manifest in the Light of the Day, and something infinite behind everything appeared.

In that last line, quoted before, Traherne lets out the secret, that this fair world is the waving, as Newman said, of the raiment of those who stand in the presence of God.

All these passages are parts of larger wholes. But there are isolated idylls to be found in our language. Mr. Yeats' well-known *Innisfree* is a good instance, not the less interesting or beautiful when we remember that he wrote it when he was living for a while in the dreary region of Marylebone:

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree, •  
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made;  
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,  
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,  
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;  
There midnight's all a-glimmer, and noon a purple glow,  
And evening full of the linnet's wings.



I will arise and go now, for always night and day  
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;  
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements gray,  
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

Another Irish idyll, perhaps more beautiful still and certainly far less well-known, is Seumas O'Sullivan's *The Sheep* :

Slowly they pass  
In the grey of the evening  
Over the wet road,  
A flock of sheep.  
Slowly they wend  
In the grey of the gloaming,  
Over the wet road  
That winds through the town.  
Slowly they pass,  
And gleaming whitely  
Vanish away  
In the grey of the evening.  
Ah, what memories  
Loom for a moment,  
Gleam for a moment,  
And vanish away,  
Of the white days  
When we two together  
Went in the evening,  
Where the sheep lay:  
We two together,  
Went with slow feet  
In the grey of the evening  
Where the sheep lay.  
Whitely they gleam  
For a moment and vanish  
Away in the dimness  
Of sorrowful years:  
Gleam for a moment  
All white, and go fading  
Away in the greyness  
Of sundering years.

No English poet has outstripped Tennyson in sheer loveliness of natural description: his poems are full of idyllic passages; with him this chapter, which might be almost endless, shall close.

King Arthur's picture of the Island Valley of Avilion

seems like an echo of Cynewulf's picture of the Phoenix's home:

I am going a long way

\* \* \* \* \*

To the island-valley of Avilion;  
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,  
Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies  
Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard lawns  
And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea,  
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound.

On the other hand, this exceedingly beautiful description of the land of the Lotos-Eaters is believed to be entirely original, though, of course, the subject was taken from the *Odyssey*:

All round the coast the languid air did swoon,  
Breathing like one that hath a weary dream.  
Full-faced above the valley stood the moon;  
And like a downward smoke, the slender stream  
Along the cliff to fall and pause and fall did seem.

A land of streams! some, like a downward smoke,  
Slow-dropping veils of thinnest lawn did go;  
And some thro' wavering lights and shadows broke,  
Rolling a slumb'rous sheet of foam below.  
They saw the gleaming river seaward flow  
From the inner land: far off, three mountain tops,  
Three silent pinnacles of aged snow,  
Stood sunset-flush'd; and dew'd with showery drops,  
Up-clomb the shadowy pine above the woven copse.

Lastly, let us recollect, but with held breath lest we break the stillness, those lines which, no doubt, owe something to older poets, but whose golden perfection are Tennyson's own, his description of the "Vale in Ida":

For now the noonday quiet holds the hill;  
The grasshopper is silent in the grass;  
The lizard, with his shadow on the stone,  
Rests like a shadow, and the cicala sleeps.  
The purple flowers droop: the golden bee  
Is lily-cradled: I alone awake.

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